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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
ETHIOPIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH  
MEKANE YESUS**

Bekure Daba

This Dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of  
Education in the University of Liverpool in part fulfilment of the  
Modular Programme  
May 1994

## ***ABSTRACT***

The place of women and their status in both Church and Society has been debated for many years. This work claims to indicate that women's work and ministry need to be recognised. Women are most important people in both these areas though they are not the ones to hold the responsible positions. Considering the place of women in Ethiopian and in African societies they do triple work (housework, child bearing and agricultural work) and even more. But because of the socio-cultural ethos, women's work is undervalued and gender bias has become obvious.

The survey of the dissertation sets out to explore, through a review of literature, how women's ministry has been seen in the church. Why can they not conduct ministry in all areas the same as their male counterparts.

The aim of the work is firstly a personal one because it is my interest to know more about the ministry of women and their place in both areas as it may help in my future service.

Secondly, it seems helpful for other people who want to deal with the subject.

This thesis contains four chapters. In chapter one women's activities in housework, their share in education, property ownership and health will be discussed. The second chapter considers women's ministry and their place in the church. In the third chapter, the question of women's ordination is explored and in the fourth one a short summary with some suggested strategies will be given.

## ***DECLARATION***

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any degree qualification or course.

Signed:.....

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## ***LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS***

AAC	Addis Ababa Congregation
CWSS	Christian Women Service Section
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of nature and Natural Resources
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
SES	South Ethiopia Synod
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WICAS	Women In Church And Society
WS	Western Synod



## *INTRODUCTION*

First of all I would like to sketch the general features of the country Ethiopia. Geographically Ethiopia is situated at the eastern part of Africa and bordered by Sudan on the west, Kenya on the south and the east by Djibuti and Somalia. The area of the country seems to be large which is about 471,778 square miles (1,221,900 sq.m.)<sup>1</sup> There are many highlands and mountain peaks rising up to 4620 metres above sea level.

The climate of Ethiopia seems to be pleasant, because of its highlands. The average temperature is between 14°C-19°C<sup>2</sup>. There are two known seasons, namely dry season, October to March and the wet season, May to September. The length of day and night is equal with 12 hours of each.

The estimated population of Ethiopia at the present time seems to be about 56.7 million<sup>3</sup> and possibly over 50 per cent of the people are under 20 years of age.

Considering the social and economic life of the people, originally most of them were living as nomads but at present many of them are settled with their cattle and living off agriculture. The farmers grow different grains, some grow coffee which is a cash crop and the main product to be exported. Cotton is also one of the important cash crops for commercial purposes.

Looking at the language there are many languages and dialects as well. Of these the very oldest one is "Geez" which is still used in the EOC for liturgical purposes. It was replaced by Amharic language which used to be the national language. Many tribal languages are found in the country. Arabic is spoken by some and English is used as an international language.

In the case of Religion, Ethiopia is a Christian country. Although there are many Muslims and pagans, more than half of the country are Christians. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has the largest number of members. There are various Christian Churches in the country, such as the Roman Catholic Church, EECMY, the seventh day Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal churches etc.

Regarding the scope of the dissertation, one of the main reasons why I will consider this topic is a personal one. I am interested in doing research on this subject, because I need to know more about the ministry of women in both church and society, especially from the perspective of Ethiopian women. Most concentration will be on the situation of women in the EECMY.

Secondly, I believe it may help the other women or men who are interested in dealing with women's' issues in both areas. Again this study seems to be helpful in my future service among women.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In chapter one I shall analyse the life and status of women in the Ethiopian society. The second chapter will state the various activities and involvement of women in the church ministry and their place within the church as well. Chapter three will explore the question of the ordination of women in general and in particular in the EECMY with different arguments. In the fourth chapter I shall try to summarise the analyses of the former chapters and identify some suggestions for future strategies. Finally a conclusion and recommendations will be given.

## *References: Introduction*

1. G.L. Della Vida "Ethiopia" Emanuel Friedman (Ed) Collier's Encyclopaedia, Macmillan Educational Company, 1982, p.347.
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## *CHAPTER 1*

### *Women in Home and Society in Ethiopia*

As far as the women's issues are concerned it seems vital to consider the development of women in various situations.

Any development<sup>1</sup> connotes gradual advancement through progressive stages which bring in directed dynamic improvements and expansion of needed material and encompasses human resources for accomplishment of goals beneficial to the whole society regardless of gender.

In the progress of the process of development the human element is crucial; it is through the inventive talents of human beings that resources are mobilised. But up to now, due to historical facts and socio-cultural reasons African countries have not effectively utilised half of their human resources, the women. However, the historical factors and socio-cultural elements often limit the development of women. There is no written law in the books to declare the marginalisation of women. It originates from custom. Of course the law is important and order the socio-economic structure, yet the customs do have some power over the legal order.

For this reason Daniel Haile disputes that "Even though it is the lawmakers who propose, it is the society that disposes"<sup>2</sup>. For Haile there is great difference between the law in the books and the law in action. To promote women's development such laws should be respected rather than honouring unnecessary customs which are still dominant.

In this chapter special consideration will be given to women and house work, education, agriculture, employment and health. All these will be discussed within the Ethiopian context.

## 1.1 Housework

In Ethiopia processing, cooking, washing and washing-up are exclusively women's work. They perform back-breaking, fatiguing work. Helen Pankhurst writes "Women [in Ethiopia] would get up early in the morning and bend over a grinding stone for at least an hour, a couple of times a week"<sup>3</sup>. Here the crucial point which should be underlined is the whole family looks to the woman for its daily food. In Ethiopia food preparation is women's work only and women are obliged by culture to do so. But the surprising thing is that women are often the last members of the family who may eat and take the very least of all the family members. Peter Schwab reflects that "At the times of famine [in Ethiopia] women and little girls were always fed the last"<sup>4</sup>. Women of Ethiopia thought about others rather than themselves even during the hard times. They care for the others, but no one looks after them. Some women in the rural areas never eat proper food if the husband is away.

As one research project shows, in Britain the average housework of women in a week is 77 hours.<sup>5</sup> But in Africa it could be more and harder. In Europe women do not have to bother about gathering fire wood, fetching water, pounding and grinding grains, whereas women in African countries do all these tasks.<sup>6</sup>

As it has been seen, housework is very hard work, yet no one values it as work. It is never ending and unrewarded. Ann Oakley<sup>7</sup> indicates that women spend much time doing housework - cleaning the house everyday, and washing the floor often, but still there are times when the house gets unclean. The fact is women are busy throughout their lives as the housework goes on ad infinitum.

As it was mentioned earlier African women do more housework. For example, as the calculation timetable of Somalian woman, daily housework shows<sup>8</sup> that on cooking, serving and child care she spends 20.5 hours per day. This time is also applicable to the Ethiopian

women, nevertheless it does not apply to those who have jobs apart from the housework.

Among Ethiopian men today a man never even does washing up in the kitchen, thus there is no record of man's contribution in the time that is spent on housework. Despite all such constant and hard work for the family in every aspect, the women are not the ones who control the property. The culture or custom says that women should do the housework and the man should take control, including the control of the women themselves. This is our culture which dominates us and encourages a bias to men. What is surprising is that women themselves do not allow the man to give a hand in the kitchen if he wants to, for they accept patriarchy's norms.

As the above is unfair it can be argued that both women and men must take the housework and family care responsibility equally. A further debate is why women are excluded from controlling the property. The housework is counted as women's work when it is unpaid, but when men do the same work at pubs and bakery houses, it is paid work, it can be identified as man's work.

In Ethiopia, since the housework is only a woman's work, sometimes even the very young boys can hit their older sisters in the kitchen to get food from them. As quoted in Sharon Gould: "my little brother, - only five year and yet the other day he punched me and it nearly killed me, a 14 year old girl"<sup>9</sup>. Though this seems old fashioned some people in my country even practice this nowadays. The policy of the country does not allow such prejudices but it does not seem to influence peoples' practice.

In addition to the housework women are responsible for caring for the children. Child bearing is also counted as one of their duties. As is common in any of the African countries, in Ethiopia women have less importance than men and are valued for marriage and reproduction too. They are viewed as being there to produce the

population. The children themselves are more likely to be viewed as investments, because the girls especially are produced to help with the housework.

Many customs surround young girls. At the age of 5-8 a girl should be circumcised and be ready for marriage to a man she doesn't know. The marriage is arranged by the parents starting from the age of 15. When she gets married the woman should give birth and the first born should be a baby boy. If she does not give birth to a boy a sudden conflict is created by the husband and his family. Because of this situation sometimes divorce can be obtained. Of course, these situations do not occur with the educated families or in cities, but the vast majority of girls in the rural areas have such difficulties.

In general, women in Ethiopia have different problems in holding all the responsibilities of the housework, marriage and caring for the family. If the economy of the country allows, they should be able to claim payment.

As quoted in Clare Ungreson:

our housework goes on behind the scenes unnoticed, uncounted, uncharted as long as it is unpaid. But if we demand to be paid for it, if we demand for housework from the state....we are saying first of all that housework is work....we are saying that we women need money of our own....if we are not forced to depend on men for money we would not have to put their needs before ours, to serve them....physically, emotionally....we say to bring up children is work and we want a wage for all the work we do.<sup>10</sup>

Women are like hens who look after themselves said one woman. Pankhurst writes "similarly, women fetch their own water and their own meals whilst the men folk are fed and given drink".<sup>11</sup> They are treated indifferently. Thus there must be serious attention from the state and the society in order to give credit to women's work.

However, the above claim seems to be a typical western women's view. Yet, there are points which could apply to Ethiopia. For the time being, however, if payment is not available the society needs to appreciate the women's work. The state also needs to recognise it. In the long run there is no reason not to ask for payment.

## 1.2 Education

"Educate a boy and you educate a person  
educate a girl and you educate a nation."<sup>12</sup>

The statement is vital and should be heard by the Ethiopian women who have not yet fully participated in the world of education. In Ethiopia people say the woman is the central wall of the house. If the central wall of the house is strong the whole house would not get old. Similarly to educate a woman is the way of making the central one strong and valuable. It is to avoid unnecessary problems and seek to have a healthy community. However, in the country, education and training opportunities for women did not automatically improve their position in society nor guarantee their equal participation in present development. Inequality in education devalues women's progress in both urban and rural areas. Despite all the difficulties there are women who are educated and trained to improve their status within the family and in the community, but these are very few. Nowadays the whole world has understood that the education of women could be one of the best investments any country can make. Similarly Ethiopia may benefit by educating women in improving the life of the whole nation by ignoring the traditional belief which says "educating a girl is a waste of money".

Maria Luisa from India says that

I educate women more than men. Women bear and raise the children. So women prepare the future. How can the future be good if women are ignorant.<sup>13</sup>



What Luisa makes clear is that women are the gateway of the future, so that to educate them leads to creating a new vision for further development, because the children who are the future hope, would gain much of the knowledge from the women. Luisa is intelligent to support women's education, because denying it is nothing but ignoring the future and desiring backward life instead of moving forward. In the past the education of women was unacceptable. A sixteenth century Mexican nun says "women who can read more than the Lord's prayer are considered dangerous".<sup>14</sup>

An old person from Dar Es Salaam decided not to send his daughter to school. He told someone:

I think I have told you that I do not intend to take any of my daughters to school. The school girls are a problem to their families. They get pregnant illegally; sometimes these girls became prostitutes.<sup>15</sup>

This kind of horrible message, which has been passed on from the patriarchy, highly oppressed the women of Ethiopia. They did not to participate fully in the education world, especially during the feudal government when only 5% of women were literate. The above sayings are still very common in the country.

But in 1974<sup>16</sup>, when the Marxist government emerged, women threw themselves into a struggle to liberate themselves from illiteracy and break all the cultural barriers which ignore the education of women. 98% of them were liberated during that time. The fact was that women benefited from the Marxist government and this was shown by the UNESCO report of the time.

Literacy is seen to be more important for men than for women. However, the above mentioned was that according to 1984 statistical data male literacy rate in rural areas is nearly 35% and the female rate is 20% whereas in urban areas the male literacy rate is 81% while female literacy rate is 62.7%.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays it seems easy, at least partially, to overcome the cultural obstacles toward women's education, but things were not like this always, even 16 years ago. For example, during my school age my parents sent the boys to school while I was refused permission to go. But supported by my elder brother I could continue with my schooling. Yet my parents became hard and chased me away from home because they said that girls should not be educated unless it was for housework. They could not be allowed to work in the office or be leaders.

I finished my elementary schooling in a very hard situation by being persecuted by all relatives and the whole community. One of my classmates had to cease schooling. She went on a school trip without her parents permission. When she returned her father would not allow her to go to school anymore. Now she is the mother of five children. I could say thanks to God that I am still continuing with my education. Having seen these situations one can imagine that there are various obstacles for women (girls) not to continue with their education, including financial pressures and opposition from many people. In my own case everybody discouraged me. My uncle said that "you are one of the prostitutes" but I was not. The only reason why he said this was that I went to school, because it was culturally wrong. For me, this time was a time of patience, sacrifice and temptation for I was on the battlefield.

Considering my own struggle certainly there were a lot of girls who were brilliant yet could not get any support from the family to be educated. "Women's interest in learning is high" (UNESCO)<sup>18</sup>, but who listens to them? To push the matter forward there is a cry from everywhere to anyone who likes to listen.

Women are deprived of humanity even at school because teachers are sometimes reluctant to give them marks even for what they do. "Dr Clare Bradley in her work considers "when being a girl

loses you marks."<sup>19</sup> When I was at the high school, there was an exam in which I got everything right, but I remember the teacher gave me 65% when I argued a lot he said that "none of the boys got what you have got". At the time I did not understand this matter, but now I realise that "being a girl loses marks".

Women's problems are similar throughout the world. There is great segregation, exploitation and discrimination even from their own families or parents. Why did many people like the Dar Es Salaam old man decide not to educate their daughters? Women have this question in their mind. Was it for the benefit of the girls? What about nowadays? Is it really abolished and are women completely free to be educated? All I can say is all these questions are open, but if every woman continued to look for change there is nothing which cannot be changed. Education is a way of changing or transforming. If this was not the case there would be no need of literacy even if the nation needs a real change. I urge my country to encourage the education of women in order to change the nation as a whole. Women are active and creative in any area work if they get the opportunity.

### **1.3 Agriculture and Ownership of Land/Property**

Most of the field work is done by women as they do an average of 2600 hours per year.<sup>20</sup>

In stating the position of women in agriculture we shall look at the two areas: ownership of land and secondly participation of women in the peasant association. The consideration of these two major areas will give us a complete picture of women's social and legal positions .

Considering the pre-revolution period of the formal laws of the country, there was no sex discrimination in ownership and administration of the land.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the law reports as such, in both the north and the south of the country, the custom did not allow *female ownership and the only possibility occurred when there was no male in the family.*<sup>22</sup>

Often customs play a central role in continuing women's inequality. But it can be argued that customs are created by men so that everything in them is for the benefit of men, and the men are the vehicles for transforming the customs. However, as the Marxist government was critical of this it can be suggested that this government introduced the idea of the equality of women in the country. The proclamation of 1975 eradicated feudalism and provided land for all according to their needs and women too could get their share. This was completely different from the feudal time.

As Peter Schwab writes, one of the women's associations chairperson said that

when the rich families owned the land, women were not allowed to till the field - since they got a percentage of the crop, the landlords only wanted strong men working the fields, so if the husbands died the women had to leave and become either servants, beggars or prostitutes. But with the land reform every family whether it be headed by a man or a woman got the same amount of land to work.<sup>23</sup>

The above explanation really reflects the experience of every woman in the country. They were facing double oppression. In the first place they did not have any share of their own unless they got the share of their husband from the landlord. But the revolution brought a great change to the development of women. At the time they achieved some form of equality and got an opportunity to share in politics and economy alike.

Far more women could own the land, even unmarried girls. But there was an oversight in the process. For instance, though women constituted about 50% of the rural population their membership in the peasant association was much less. The total membership of the peasant association is 5,164,178, women number only 657,003 or 12.72%.<sup>24</sup> Women were not only underrepresented in membership but

the land which was distributed to the family was registered in the husbands name. Since the men did not fully believe in the equality of women, the distribution of equality was hardly practised.

For this reason this law had created great problem especially in the rural areas. There was misunderstanding. In Ethiopian culture, for example, a woman should wash her husband's feet every evening. One night, one of the peasant wives asked her husband to wash her feet, because they were told that everybody was equal. The husband was offended and boiled the water to the highest degree centigrade and splashed it on the feet of his wife; she became badly scalded.

The emergence of many changes during the revolution was by force and lacked adequate information. If there had been mutual understanding women could have developed more. But as power was in the hands of the peasant association who were men, they started to oppress women in giving them eroded land. Only women whose husbands were on the committee could get the good land within the share of their husbands. Since this was the case women did not gain all that was promised. However, Mengistu, the head of the state, spoke about the great importance of women in the achievement of the Revolution. The government has provided them with a full share in the decision making, but it was hardly implemented. Women's minimal role in the decision making is not primarily because of the law, but it seems to be also because of the social norms or custom.

Customs cannot be totally ignored and so any custom which ignores the equality of women in any way should be abolished. If women have enough places on the decision making bodies they can indicate the unnecessary cultural affairs and also point out the problems of the unemployment of women on a large scale. To promote such things the co-operation of men is vital.

## 1.4 Women and Employment

The term employment usually refers to participation in the wage labour force which excludes unpaid family workers and rural agriculture settings. According to this definition it disregards the service of housewives which the vast majority of Ethiopian women are. However, while most Ethiopian women are excluded from the definition of employees, it is true that they do perform the most backbreaking work. In the home and agricultural work women do more than men. If this is the case the claim that 93% of males and only 7%<sup>25</sup> females are economically active in Ethiopia is totally unrealistic for women and girls are the most active ones.

In policy there is no distinction between men and women in participating in employment.

Ethiopia has ratified the ILOs Employment and occupation No.11 of 1958, which indicates equal access for both men and women to vocational guidance, training, employment and remuneration for equalvalue.<sup>26</sup>

But despite the above Policy, women's participation in employment is at a very low rate. For example the survey of 1981 shows out of 362,054 employees only 64,844 or 17.9% were women.<sup>27</sup>

As has been discussed, the custom in the country views the earning of money as the role of men only. The facts of the material domestic responsibilities, women's lack of education and training have combined together and brought them to the level of high unemployment and low wage earners. As Sylvia Walby says:

women get paid less than men because they have less skills and labour market experience and fewer qualifications than men as a consequence of decisions as to the allocations of the time of men and women in households.<sup>28</sup>

Here women have a disadvantage in three major areas: qualifications, experience and skill. Because of the insufficiency of

these three elements often they cannot claim good payment as their male counterparts do. The reason why they are less qualified is not that they are not able but because most of their time is taken up with family responsibility, so that they have very limited time for studies in order to get a good qualification. They may even stop working for sometime when they give birth and when they come back to the job again lose experiences and skills as well.

Women are undermined by employers and so mothers mostly choose the part-time jobs. Elizabeth Lawrence argues that

a women may be refused promotion or even a job because she is married and has children or even because as a woman she may at some stage in the future marry and have children.<sup>29</sup>

According to the above description the employers consider marriage, being a woman or having a child as almost criminal. Of course a woman might take time off work in case her child gets ill. But such views seem unfair because married men were not asked whether they have children or not.

Because of men's bias it is problematic for women. Women need money to support the family, thus they do triple work, housework, child care and a job. Men spend their money mostly on private things, but women spend their money on the family affairs.

Women are not only victims of a very difficult selection process but in most cases they get lower payment than that of their male counterparts. Daniel Haile holds this idea and refers to Ethiopian women "If a woman worker is a clerk, the male counterpart may be called clerical officer".<sup>30</sup> This strategy was created simply to exploit women since the details of the job descriptions would remain the same. It was a fact that many employers were forcing women to receive a quarter of a man's salary for doing the same job. Daniel Haile indicates that even women who had some education were getting between US\$25 and US\$10 less per month. Women were also forced

to retire at the age of 55, whereas males could continue to work until the age of 60.<sup>31</sup>

The pre-revolutionary government oppressed women in many ways. The system provided women with one month's maternity leave with half-payment. But the Ethiopian Revolution brought good news for women when it declared equal opportunities, for example women were granted maternity leave for forty-five consecutive days with full payment. Moreover, women could participate in political, economical and social decision-making. To conclude the Ethiopian Revolution is appreciated for providing equality for women in literacy, education and employment. But part of its weaknesses was that women themselves started to exploit each other. Only the Revolutionist women benefited a great deal and the Ethiopian Communist party members had priority. The opportunity of getting a good position and a job was dependent only on membership of the Communist party rather than the citizenship of the country. The male party members were the first and the females were the second. The vast majority of Ethiopian women, who were not included in the party, remained doubly oppressed. For this reason, the Ethiopian Revolution did not bring ultimate change for all women, rather it created hierarchy among women themselves.

The other side effect of this former government is that many of the women who were engaged in this Communist party undermined the other women and rejected their own husbands if they were not one of the party members. Secondly, many of them forgot their responsibility to their family at all. In general the outcome of the revolution did not lead to a better end, especially regarding family relationships. Therefore, women need another new vision from that of the present government in all aspects.



## 1.5 Health

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.<sup>32</sup>  
(World Health Organisation)

In this section although the discussion is on health, we may also raise the education of women. According to the above mentioned health seems to be the most important right which needs to be recognised for every human being. If this is the case it is essential that women, who are the most responsible for the whole life of the family, should learn how to bring about the health of the nation. On this matter the World Bank<sup>33</sup> indicated that women should be trained as instructors in health and nutrition.

The reason for training women as health instructors is that mothers are the most important primary health care workers and many of them are very good at it. Such mothers could be sources of help for the other health care workers. Despite this fact many Ethiopian health workers are men. As far as women and children's health is concerned the best choice is to have more women health workers especially those who act like friends rather than acting like masters. They may give chances of talking to the other women whom they teach rather than doing all the work themselves; for the other women may have much to share. It is for such reasons that the World Bank urges the training of women as instructors in health and nutrition. Through discussions between individual women themselves much can be learned. For example, the issue of family planning, is one of health care. However, family planning is restricted in some African countries like West Africa. Ethiopia has practised it, but due to the shortage of health workers, family planning cannot really take good effect. One of the reasons for its failure is that many men in the rural areas are not co-operative, as the decisions on family size are often

taken by the men. As a result many children are born although some do not survive. The death rate was rose to 21 per 1000 in 1965.<sup>34</sup> If Ethiopia had sufficient workers in health care, such a high death rate and an uncontrollably high population would have been avoided.

In general, the health care of the whole country is at risk because less than 15% of the population have access to any health facilities and there is only one source of health care for every 500 people. For this the world fertility survey of 1972-84<sup>35</sup> argued that proper sanitation was a much more important factor than clean water, yet it is clear that health care and education, together with family planning counselling form an important role for the health of mothers and children in the country. This does not mean clean water is not needed.

As we have said earlier in relation to education, women working in any field would be a very effective solution to overcome many problems. If women were educated they could keep the hygiene of the whole family and could be primary teachers for the children. The life expectancy of women can be seen by their knowledge of health care. In Ethiopia women are less educated in health care, so their life expectancy at birth is about 42-52. In general to control the health of the nation the awareness of women is a decisive need.

To implement this vital need women of the country need to be organised and to be listened to. But the issue of listening to women in our country is an area of debate as it is in other countries. For this reasons Brundtland says that "Women are used to thinking in the long term" yet at the top, as at the grass roots, they are not listened to.<sup>36</sup> Brundtland's argument is a convincing one which needs more attention from both men and women - why are women still not well represented among senior decisions makers, especially in development institutions? Though all the global networks such as UNESCO, IUCN are helping women to be heard, since such organisations do not come to

the local women the information is very limited, and most of the decision makers are men. For example digging wells for water is often decided by men, but women are the ones who go to the river which is very far away. Most of the time 80%<sup>37</sup> of the health budget is spent on training doctors who are male.

This is not to oppose the male doctors, however, females are the ones who mostly deal with the health of the family. If the country had more female doctors and health care instructors, 80% of the illness in the country would be prevented. But nutrition, clean water, sanitation, immunisation and preventive health education are the most pressing needs. The responsibility for these is usually taken by women. If women are responsible for carrying out all the necessary health care of the nation why do they not have the appropriate position to decide what is best?

The truth is that failure to consult women about health, clean water, family planning, hygiene etc. leads to inefficiency.

To improve the quality of the Ethiopian nation as a whole, it seems vital that women are also involved in literacy, education and employment. To fulfill this purpose the unity of men and women is greatly needed.

In this chapter I have attempted to examine the position of women in development. The brief analysis of the different points shows such a high degree of imbalance in distribution. One can question whether the law can be an effective tool in bringing about social change. Though social change may be revolutionary, it normally comes about in a more or less orderly manner out of the consciousness of the people, in order to solve the social problems.

Women are the victims and the disadvantaged in all distributions, such as education, employment and ownership of property. The problem of women should be considered as a problem for the whole society. This is a problem for the whole society.<sup>36</sup> One

of the important tools of change seems to be the national law or legal system. Of course, to legalise the equality of women in every area is important. However, as was mentioned earlier, even though it is the law makers who propose change the society must also change.

In the next chapter we shall discuss the attitude of the EECMY towards the ministry of women.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### ***Women in the Ministry in EECMY***

This chapter tells about the ministry of women in the EECMY. I also will touch on some information to show the biblical background on women's ministry. Before that I shall describe the EECMY and ministry in general.

The EECMY is one of the most well known Churches in Ethiopia although it is the youngest one. In Ethiopia there are many denominations. Of these the Ethiopian Orthodox (EOC) is the oldest and is the state Church.

Although many of the EECMY congregations were established even before 1926<sup>1</sup>, this Church was formally instituted in 1959<sup>2</sup>. The background of the Church is the Lutheran tradition including its liturgies and worship patterns. But it is not called the Lutheran Church by name, rather it has its unique name called Ethiopian Evangelical Church "Mekane Yesus". The term "Mekane Yesus" is derived from the old Ethiopian Orthodox Church liturgical language called "geez", which means the dwelling place of Christ. The emphasis that this Church is founded on the true word of God and proclaims Christ's death and resurrection, while believing in the Lordship of Christ who has granted every nation, to become the holy people of God in his name (cf. Pt 2:9).

#### **2.1 Structure**

The structure of this Church magnifies the importance of the Church at the local Congregational level in addition to the importance of the parish, district, synod and Church at national levels. Most importantly it encourages the growth of strong lay leadership and elects new presidents every four years rather than electing bishops who serve continually. The first elected President<sup>3</sup> of the EECMY was a lay person and from 1959-1993 the Church was led by lay ministers. This does not



mean that the leadership of the ordained ministers is ignored, but the lay ministers are considered for office as well. Similarly synods are led by Presidents who can be either ordained or lay<sup>4</sup>.

Synods, districts and parishes, the leaders of the presbyteries and area work are led by the full-time worker,s, whereas Congregations are led by voluntary elders. The one who chairs the elders is the President of the Congregation. The elders are elected from the full members of the Congregation, the Communicants, every four years. Women also can be elected as members of the elders, but not as a President of the Congregation.

According to the statistical data of 1992 there are 1,637,025<sup>5</sup> members. At the present time this Church has more than nine synods and two presbyteries. (Presbytery in the understanding of the EECMY is lower than the synod and higher than the district. There is one area work in the northern part of the country. Area work is at the same level as the Presbytery except different in name.)

Within the synods there are 2702 Congregations (which must consist of more than 25 communicants); 1068 preaching places<sup>6</sup> (that is new believers which have not yet reached congregational level and which consists of less than 25 communicants).

There is a great shortage of people to serve in all the areas. For example, at the present time there are only 339 pastors (male), 582 evangelists (male and female) and 31,704 voluntary workers (male and female)<sup>7</sup>.

One can see that the Church is mostly run by voluntary and lay ministers. This shows that the Church utilises both volunteers and lay people. This kind of structure is given a high appreciation nationally and globally within the Lutheran sister Churches. It can be said, therefore, that this Church has been built up in a purely democratic way and actually it was the first democratic institution in Ethiopia, especially when compared with the EOC<sup>8</sup>.

Every synod and presbytery has its own regional autonomy. With the exception of one synod, all of the EECMY synods encourage both lay and ordained ministers to be the leaders of parishes, districts and synods. The exceptional synod is the WS which favours only ordained ministers for the above mentioned positions.

## 2.2 Activities

The EECMY's general policy for all its activities is that of working for the benefits of the society. The motto of this Church embraces the function of a holistic ministry. This means serving the totality of men and women, physically and spiritually, without separating one from the other.

In the first place the Church proclaims the gospel of Christ Jesus which is the message of salvation for all men and women through Christ. This deals with the spiritual needs of the people, but if they did not get any attention for their physical and material needs the Church ministry would not have achieved its goals. Although the word of God is central, physical needs also have their own priority. Therefore, the Church has a responsibility to attend to physical needs such as feeding the hungry and caring for the body which was created in the image of God. Therefore, wherever the Church establishes districts, there are also schools, clinics, hospitals, relief work etc. When the Evangelical ministry departments of the Church and the synods deal with evangelistic works, the development departments deal with the humanitarian services. Although some of the donor agencies want to focus more on development work rather than the evangelistic work, the Church never wants to consider them in separate ways. The indigenous people make a distinction between evangelistic and community work. This is the same pattern which the missionaries followed when establishing the Church. As the Church has grown various ministries have continually appeared.

Although the Church has been involved in humanitarian progress to benefit society, such as education, literacy and providing health programmes, its primary responsibility is to preach the gospel of Christ in order to make salvation known to mankind. The Reverend Gudina Tumssa<sup>9</sup>, the first executive general secretary of the EECMY mentioned that the reason why the Church is involved in humanitarian service is not to make any profit for itself, but to help the many needy people in the society. It is the love of God through Christ which made the Church to love others. Jesus Christ said "you should love God above all else and your brothers [neighbours] as yourself (Matthew, 22:37-39)<sup>10</sup>.

### **2.3 The Attitude Towards Women's Ministry**

Women are the best friends of religion<sup>11</sup>. More than half of the Church attendants are women. They also render a lot of service to build up of Church life.

The Church recognises the importance of the ministry of women in general. Women are involved in every part of the Church ministry. This does not mean that every ministry of the Church includes women in practice, though they are very willing to do so.

The Christian Women's service section functions under the evangelism department. Its primary service is preaching the good news to men and women since women are also commissioned to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ by Christ himself.

The section also deals very much with community service to help the needy people and the women to take care of their family as well as neighbours, through both physical and spiritual nurturing. It encompasses social service in its daily ministry in order to encourage women's development.

### **2.4 What is Ministry?**

In the Encyclopaedia of Religion, the term ministry in general "refers to office of leadership in the Christian Church....it also describes the way the mission of the whole Church is conducted".<sup>12</sup> The

definition of the term indicates that the term ministry includes the whole Church service and mission. The ministry of the Church is guided by Christ Himself. John Stacey claims that "his ministry consisted partly of preaching and teaching".<sup>13</sup> Stacey rightly puts the emphasis on the preaching and teaching of Christ and goes on to say "the ministry of Jesus was and is shared with the whole Church".<sup>14</sup>

The Church is the body of Christ, it includes everybody who gathers together in fellowship to share this universal ministry. The vital point that is noted here is that the ministry was and is shared with men, women and children. Those who share the ministry are also commissioned to exercise it continually regardless of gender.

As quoted in J. Bakke the Lutheran understanding of ministry seems to be as follows "The word ministry in its broadest sense, denotes the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as local community or as the universal Church".<sup>15</sup>

The definition which is stressed more here is that of 'being called'. Luther<sup>16</sup> here underlines two kinds of callings from God for a person to perform the ministry. First the direct divine call and commission like Paul (1.Cor.9:if:15:1-11, Gal.1:1,17)<sup>17</sup>. Second, indirect call which is for any minister, male or female, through other people (e.g. Acts, 1:15-26)<sup>18</sup>.

Various ministries are exercised through each individual, for example, witness, Church musicians, Sunday school teachers, preachers, co-ordinators of women's' groups and pastors as ordained ministers.<sup>19</sup> Women's ministry has been a part of the Church from the very early ages until this day.

## **2.5 The Background of Women's Ministry**

Women have always been involved in ministry. For example in the Old Testament there were very outstanding women, such as Miriam the prophet, Deborah the judge, Huldah the prophet of Easter,

the policy advocate who intervened on behalf of the People of Israel, of Ruth the care giver. Side by side with this is the suggestion that women were of little importance.<sup>20</sup> They are virtually ignored, could not lay testimony<sup>21</sup> and to talk in public with a man was forbidden. There is also the well known prayer in the synagogue service which a man should pray three times a day. "Blessed art thou O Lord...who has not made me a woman."<sup>22</sup> Women are often considered to be stupid, garrulous and lazy, though they are still considered to be strong enough to work hard in the home. They were considered to be in the same category as children and slaves. For this reason Josephus boldly says "The woman, is in all things inferior to a man."<sup>23</sup>

The Bible has always been interpreted in different ways within different traditions and cultures. Although appeals were often made to the Bible to support mistreatment of women, it is my belief that this is a reflection of their culture and not an honouring of the word of God which considers all humankind equally.

When Jesus' attitude towards women is considered it is radically different. For instance, the story of Mary the Mother of Jesus, is a high point. Some scholars suggest that it is a turning point in the history of women, for her case indicates the exaltation of women. Jesus recognised women as His sisters and men as brothers (Matt, 12:50). It is marvellous because at this point the closed door of the Jewish tradition was opened and barriers were eradicated. Some scholars<sup>24</sup> accept this as the beginning of female equality with men.

Although women were in an inferior position in Jewish society they became well accepted by Jesus as special like some other men. Even women ministered to Jesus himself, (Lk.8:3ff). As quoted in the EECMY theological Consultation by the Reverend Yonas Deressa, C.C. Ryie writes about the women who were ministering Jesus "Our Lord's relations with the women who attended Him are distinct from His relation with the men disciples in one very remarkable particular way

He ministered to the men. But the women ministered to Him. Five of these ministering women who followed Jesus are mentioned by name (Matt.27:55 and par.)."<sup>25</sup>

Women were also the first to receive the good news of the resurrection (John, 20) and to proclaim it to the disciples. Though the Rabbis counted women as unteachable<sup>26</sup>, Jesus talked with them and taught the women (Matt, 9:18-23; Lk, 10:38-42; John, 4:5-26, 11:20-33). For example Jesus was teaching and Mary was sitting at the Lord's feet, which was unusual in the Jewish tradition. Mary Evans says "the picture is that of a Rabbi instructing his pupil".<sup>27</sup> The pupil here is a woman who listens intelligently to Jesus, to know more about the kingdom of God, like her male counterparts. In Jesus there is no difference, because his actions towards women do not suggest that he viewed women as insignificant as some other traditions do.

Thus Paul proclaims that in Christ there is no difference of race, status and sex which humankind imposes (cf. Gal, 3:27-28). This is the Word of God in which the Church believes and confirms the unity of the whole people of God in baptism. Confirming this equality women were serving as deaconesses - Phoebe (Rom, 16:1), Junia as an apostle (Rom, 16:7) Priscia as a teacher. Though some scholars have doubt about Junia's gender, Granfield<sup>28</sup> considers the context of the Roman name and tries to confirm this as a female name. The probability is that Andronicus and Junia were husband and wife.

Above all, women were in ministry in Jewish society in the New Testament and in the early Church though they were not officially known and few are documented. It is true that the same story is still going on. Practically all Christian women are engaged in a variety of the Church ministries though they too are marginalised by male bias. The interesting thing is that women are very open to be involved in any ministry according to their call and they are the most eager ones

to encourage family devotions. Wherever there is a Church, women are in ministry.

In the following piece I shall look at the actual ministry of women in the EECMY and their places within this Church.

## **2.6 Women's Ministry in the EECMY**

The ministry of women in this Church is as old as the establishment of the EECMY as a national Church and in some places older than that. For example, women ministered in 1913<sup>29</sup> at Adi Ugri which is part of Eriterea, and in 1926<sup>29</sup> in the Addis Ababa congregation etc.

The Church ministry has been carried out by both males and females of past and present generations. Though some of the Churches in Ethiopia do not acknowledge women's ministries (e.g. Ethiopian Orthodox Church), in principle many of the EECMY congregations are comfortable with most of women's ministry, if not all. This ministry is divided into two parts - Evangelical ministry and Social ministry.

Women's ministry is not a new phenomenon, it follows the motto of the Church, which is serving the whole man and woman.

## **2.7 Evangelical Ministry**

In 1976 the EECMY women's work office was officially established. A full-time worker was assigned at the central office in Addis Ababa. As the Church grew the women's service also showed *great development*. It developed in many ways over a period of years overcoming many difficulties. Thus every synod assigned a full-time women's work secretary at the synod level in order to organise the women within the synod. Soon after, many districts assigned full-time workers to expand much of the evangelistic work.

The women's service in this office has its own purpose which is "to proclaim Christ through words and deeds in order to make salvation known to human kind".<sup>30</sup> This purpose refers to the work of holistic ministry which is the major work of the Church.

The main task of the 'Women's Work Secretary' at head office is to prepare materials, arrange courses, seminars, workshops and visit the synods women's work. Such seminars help the women to share experiences with one another. Reports at the seminars from every woman teach valuable lessons. That is because every woman has different experiences and special gifts relating to her specific daily service. Women enjoy the fellowship which creates a friendship.

Making friendship is of great value and many women theologians appreciate it. Feminist theology believes very much in oneness and friendship. Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, in their book *Introducing Feminist Theology* (1979), refer to Mary Daly.<sup>31</sup> Daly claims the idea of being a friend as important. For Daly this concept of friendship is very important, because it broadens the concept from personal involvement into a wider thought and context. In these days more than at any other time, when there is unity and friendship among women many things can be accomplished. Friendship stimulates self development and creates personal relationships and a meaningful network of interactions.

It is profitable when women converse together, because it strengthens them and creates an expectation for future meetings.

For this reasons Marga Bührig says "Church women began to get together in women's groups; they read the Bible together, in their thirst for knowledge, they turned to biblical figures of women with affection and made their own discoveries. They created their own space, because they needed time to discover themselves".<sup>32</sup> When women come together there is blessing and witnessing. Evangelistic work starts here. When women exchange in this way within the Church it promotes great development and change. In their groups women practice how to share and listen to one another.

For women, organisation is very important even though it is not always appreciated. There is one proverb which is known among



society "whenever women gather, the potatoes do not boil". However such sayings discourage women's organisation. Their gathering is highly accepted by women if not by men. As quoted in Bührig "women organise themselves separately because one day it strikes them that society is and has been actively controlled by men, so that we must examine society and its institutions from the different stand points of women, in order to participate actively in the shaping of our lives and our future".<sup>33</sup> According to Bührig this refers also to Church. She discovers that Church is led only by men, women are excluded from leading any of the executive positions. When women organise themselves much can be achieved, especially in pointing out the prejudices of male selfishness. Thus the organisation of women in this church needs great attention at all levels.

There are committees from synod level up to congregational level.<sup>34</sup> Most of the work is done at congregational level by voluntary committee members. The women's group at congregational level comes together regularly once a week or once in every two weeks, and has programmes such as: prayer time, learning new songs, bible studies and handicrafts.

The district women's work secretary arranges different courses for the district, parish and congregation women's committee members, and encourages the groups whenever she visits them to cover all the lessons and be ready to reflect on what they have learned. The organisation of women in the Church is one of the most important for the growth of the Church.

## 2.8 Fund Raising

In the EECMY women are very active in fund raising. Every congregation arranges an auction day once a year to sell the handicrafts. Everybody does something according to her gifts. In the city congregations much money can be gained (e.g. AAC). The sale on this day could gain between 5,000-10,000 Ethiopian Birr (Ethiopian

currency). The Church has benefited a great deal from the organisation of women, but although women are responsible for making all these efforts, they are not the ones who control the money. It is controlled by the elders which are dominated by men. At many places women have difficulties in getting money even to buy new materials in order to start the handicrafts after the auction day sales.

Mrs Tenagne Negussie the EECMY Christian Women Service Assistant Secretary complains about the situation of women in some of the EECMY synods, presbyteries and area work. She says that women produce a lot of money but they cannot use it when they need it themselves.

In AAC the women give sufficient amount of money to the congregations when they fund raise from the sale and auction day, but at most of the congregations a budget would not set aside for them to begin them again for the New Year. So women have financial difficulties.<sup>35</sup>

According to Negussie it seems that women are only the donors and not recipients. Why are women treated in such a way within their Church? Is it just? In general it seems that women do not have responsibility to control even what they make with their own hands, which is the result of their handiwork's. They have been preparing for a year and when it gets into good shape and is changed into money it is handed over to someone else.

Another unjust element is that the district women leaders do not have any benefit such as daily or monthly allowance, whereas the male district leaders and parish leaders have a monthly allowance and in addition they are provided with houses to live in. Considering all these cases it seems correct to support Negussie's complaint and conclude that women's ministry has its own difficulties regarding their work and status in the Church.

In 1976 the General Assembly, which is the highest decision making body of the Church, raised the issue of self-reliance for the first time. However, the small women's fellowships of the AAC were already in existence, and had been even before the recognition of the EECMY nationally. About 1942 this fellowship of women was allocated 500 Ethiopian Birr as an annual budget for Church work.<sup>36</sup> The AAC is the earliest positive example of our Church women's organisation and remains one of the most active and richest congregations.

Even though I have said much about women in fund raising, I regret that the women's ministry is often limited to this area. Mr Wadajo Wolde Senbet, the former evangelism department director of the South Ethiopian synod argues that"

In the EECMY today, female members of the Church are playing a significant role in the ministry of the Church....their contribution to the economic life of the congregations is substantial....they are more devoted and active than men in this respect.<sup>37</sup>

According to Wolde Senbet women are only gifted in fund raising. Though he appreciates their role in the Church ministry, he puts a great emphasis on the Church economy. Of course the Church may need some money for the spreading of the gospel, but it seems unfair to limit women's ministry to raising finances. Women are called to do more than this since women receive the Holy Spirit equally with men in order to be able to witness to Christ (Acts, 2:1ff). Therefore, the assumption that women are only gifted in fund raising seems unrealistic. Women then may declare that they want to be involved in the variety of ministries. For instance, doing devotions, visiting people, preaching and teaching whenever it is possible.

## **2.9 Preaching (Kerygma) and Teaching (Didache)**

Kerygma is a Greek word which means preaching the essential story of life, death, burial, resurrection and expected coming of Jesus

Christ.<sup>38</sup> As quoted in John Stacey C.K. Barrett says that there is great difference between teaching and preaching. He claims that

I can teach anything, I am myself capable of learning and apprehending; but I can preach only what I believe.<sup>39</sup>

Preaching is part of believing and without believing preaching is no use.

The Addis Ababa Congregation, which is the mother Church to all the EECMY Congregations, can be seen as an example of denying a woman the chance of preaching from the pulpit. However, the fact that no one can deny is that in this Congregation women have been the most active in building up and planting the Church through different activities since 1923. At present although these women are invisible around the pulpit, in this particular congregation they enjoy and celebrate Christ who viewed them as important. It is sad that this congregation viewed women such that they were overlooked in terms of teaching from the pulpit. The preaching of the Word is one of the ministries, that every believer is called to exercise. In the early years of this Church, women were not engaged much in such service, because there was a high rate of illiteracy. As it has been said the EECMY support much of women's ministry. The Reverend Eteffa Gobena the EECMY Evangelism department director and the Reverend Yadessa Daba the president of the EECMY claim that women must participate in all ministries of the Church. But on the contrary there are some congregations which do not accept women as preachers from the pulpit.

For this reason Marga Bührig insists that "women are invisible in the Church and theology"<sup>40</sup>. What Bührig wants to show is that the Church expects women to be passive, listeners and silent in doing theology; meaning that, preaching and teaching about God is not a woman's job, but is the males' responsibility. John Stacey defines

theology as "speaking and thinking about God".<sup>41</sup> But in this case women's desire to talk about their Saviour publicly from the pulpit is denied.

Any ministry of the Church depends on a calling. However, most of the time the Church regards gender rather than calling. It seems unrealistic to envisage that God did not call women to preach in the seven decades of the AAC, having seen the situation of women in such congregations. Preaching from the pulpit is deliberately reserved for men by men themselves whether they are called or not for this specific service.

Gretchen Gaebelin Hull reported that someone in the Church said "using any unqualified man at all is better than choosing a qualified women to service".<sup>42</sup> This qualification could be a calling from God, but just being a woman she could not be accepted.

Moreover, such mistreatment may lead many women to a radical decision to fight against all patriarchal beliefs. The post-Christian feminist Dr Daphne Hampson<sup>43</sup> reacts against the patriarchal history of Christianity totally for it plays much against women's status in their ministries. As a result of patriarchy's belief women are considered only gifted to prepare coffee for Church meetings, decorate the Church etc., whereas men are capable of preaching and doing theology.

Above all, as Barrett states,<sup>44</sup> preaching is speaking about something that someone believes in, then it seems very unfair that women cannot speak about what they believe.

Teaching may have a different role from preaching. It involves people's response more. Regarding women's teaching some questions can be asked. Where do women teach? Can women have any opportunity to teach and be heard? Most of the time they teach women's groups, Sunday schools, fellowships and rarely at Church meetings. The problem which still remains is how much they are heard.

Some years ago I was invited to one of the EECMY districts to speak about the place of women in the Church. It was a district council. In the meeting there were only three women participants, whereas men were more than fifty. I presented my speech and claimed that more women should participate in such meetings, because the synod has already accepted the Budapest decision, which says "Any meeting of the Church should have 40% of women participants".

In my presentation I considered Deborah, Huldah, Esther etc., I focused on Deborah saying that she was leading the people of Israel as a judge. One male participant commented that "Deborah did not have an office while the male did; she was sitting under the tree when she was advising the king and she was not well organised like male judges". Hearing such a negative comment, at first I became unhappy but finally I mentioned that it did not matter whether she had an office or not, but it did matter that she was as active as males in the community and that God called her to such a place.

Many people still believe that women should be silent, even in the Church, because of the assumption that the Church should only be a male Church. When Paul writes in 1 Cor, 14:34ff; I Tim, 2:1-15 that women should be silent he was referring to his time. It seems incredible for today's people to make copy of it. It is also unreasonable to force the people to be the people of Paul's time.

Nowadays feminist theologians ask why women keep quiet in the Church though they are the majority? As quoted in Marga Bührig's book "Women Invisible" Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that:

The deliberate or unconscious silencing of women in the Church engenders our ecclesiastical and theological invisibility. Although women are the majority of people still going to Church and of those joining religious

orders, the Church is officially represented by males only.<sup>44</sup>

In Church often men are the minority in attending the Church but they are the main teachers and women are the passive listeners. Every office of teaching is occupied by men though women are the majority to attend the Church.

## 2.10 Social Work

Women are a part and parcel of the Church and have much to contribute on development issues. The Christian women's service section initiates serving both the physical and spiritual needs of society. Women in the EECMY promote and encourage the holistic ministry, because words without deeds seem to be of no use. Women give attention to a broader application of working with the Community and are engaged in holistic experiences of working, living and sharing food together and not just listening to the Word or proclaiming the Word.

To serve in social work among the community these women have some objectives to deal with during their weekly meetings:

- Home Economics
- Agriculture
- Gardening
- Literacy etc.<sup>45</sup>

However, writing and reading is hardly exercised among the rural women's meeting, they are more excited by being together and having basic education in home economics, literacy and gardening. Women are eager to learn new things from each other. Their meeting day is a day of gaining different experiences from each other as well as from the woman co-ordinator.

As has been indicated most of the agricultural work is done by women, thus the congregation's women learn about agriculture, because to teach them about agriculture will enable them to exploit their possibilities and provide better living conditions for the family.

The women's work secretary of the districts, encourages the women's group to take care of their gardens. Different seeds are distributed every year to the women in the rural areas. So that even the poor women discover the value of eating a variety of food stuffs, such as fruit, vegetables etc. The women grow the vegetables in their garden and use them for the family in order to protect the health of the whole family.

Health programmes are also provided for women. The Church supplies them with different health resources to save women who are really the backbone of the family. Though the resources are not sufficient the Church helps the women teaching about diseases of various kinds, to enable them to know what to do when disease occurs. Most importantly the women's work office makes many efforts to make women aware of new diseases, such as Aids.

Teaching hygiene is one of the lessons which is taught in the women's groups. As has been said earlier, lack of hygiene has harmed many children in Third World countries. Therefore, to acknowledge such lessons helps the women to take better care of their homes and families.

Family planning is the most serious issue that both parents should be aware of. This is officially accepted by the Church and the women's worker encourage both parents to have proper lessons in order to use family planning when it is needed. But sometimes problems arise from individual men who do not practice it. The women also try to understand the side effects of some harmful traditional backward practices, for instance female circumcision. Since such a practice is harmful for the health of the mothers, women are fighting against it. But it is not easy to eradicate such a deep rooted custom unless the whole society co-operate with women.

To overcome any cultural problems, women need support from their male counterparts in order to improve their lives and to bring



about change. The changes must be spiritual, social, economic and physical, because women are really poor in these areas. To fulfill women's needs the Church must pay special attention to women's development in all spheres. As the real people of God the Church must rethink deeply on women's situation. In relation to this issue, Doctor Musimbi Kanyoro writes:

The impact of development on poor people, especially women, particularly in the light of global economic and political crises call for rethinking of development and bring them up to advocate alternative processes that would give principle emphasis to the basic survival needs of the majority of the world's people. The experience of poor women throughout the world and their struggle for basic survival exposes the imbalances in the current development process. Their aspirations for a future free of the multiple oppression of gender, class, race and nation should be from the basis of a new vision and strategy for human development.<sup>46</sup>

As Kanyoro indicates there are a lot of things which are not in balance. Women are victimised in various ways. For example, health care is one of their problems. Many women who live far away from the hospital die of pregnancy and child birth. They do not even get proper primary health care, to take care of their own health and that of their children. Thus it seems wise if the Church would have a deep concern to balance things and reshape a new vision and new strategies for women.

## **2.11 Education and Training**

As has already been seen women hardly participate in either education or training. Should the Church have any involvement in order to educate women? Both in the Church and in society, especially in Africa, women do not get the opportunity for further education though there are funds set aside. In the case of the Church the LWF always urges the Church to give priority to educate women and

accumulates 40% funds for such purposes (e.g. for the theological studies). I shall come back to this later within this section.

The EECMY Christian women's service office trains women in different areas. For example training in sewing machines, English language abroad<sup>47</sup>, women's leadership within the country and abroad as well<sup>48</sup>. But this is not enough, because there does not seem to be equal participation in comparison with the percentage of women in the Church (53.26% women, 46.74% men).<sup>49</sup> If this is the case, the EECMY may need some adjustment to make equal contribution among the majority of its membership.

Considering this idea J.K. Mwalimu Nyrere argues that "the development of any African nation depends so much on women and it cannot be reached without them".<sup>50</sup> We can think of the Church in the same way. The important point here is that the Church would move with two legs if it included women fully in its development. It is not possible to move fast with one leg only. It seems impossible, therefore, to expect that half the Church can develop the Church itself.

Although the LWF accumulates funds of 40% specifically for the education of women, there is great doubt as to whether women are educated in proportion to their membership. In relation to education and training the former EECMY CWSS mentions clearly the great gap between men and women in receiving education. In 1989 the EECMY total membership was 121,661.<sup>51</sup> Of this 60% were women but the percentage receiving education was much less than 60%. For example for scholarships in Ethiopia women's share was 24% and men's was 76%. Abroad women's share was 13% but men's was 86%.<sup>52</sup>

In the EECMY there are very few women theologians. It is not surprising that the Mekane Yesus seminary in over 30 years of its history only ten women graduated, nine with diplomas and one with a degree (B.Th).<sup>53</sup> Of these nine, two were called to heavenly rest and

the seven are serving the Church. In addition, three women are presently studying at the seminary at diploma level.

## 2.12 Synthesis

The place of women in the Church seems to be problematic especially where education, employment and their status is considered. In the Church, like in secular offices, the majority of women work as secretaries, nurses, teachers etc. But they are rarely assigned as head teachers, clinic supervisors and officers, though they are equally qualified like their male counterparts. For example, when a woman holds the same qualification as a man, he can be assigned or appointed as a department head or general executive secretary of the synod, the Church etc., but the woman can be pushed into any vacancy even if it does not fit in with her qualification. This is clearly discrimination.

The other point which really needs attention is the place of women in decision making. Though there are some women who can participate in such processes, in many of the Church committees, women are invisible. There are women participants in the synod executive committee, Church executive committee and at general assemblies, nevertheless, they do not share much. This is because they are few in number and do not have experience of other committees and are intimidated by the intellectual tone of the meetings.

There are other Church committees which deliberately exclude women. For instance, the scholarship committee, theological commission, the development commission, the seminary board etc. These are the key places where many decisions are taken. Would it be possible that in such places women's issues could be raised? Can the women get equal distribution in their absence? The answer is reserved for the reader.

In the history of the EECMY there have been only two women Church officers. The first woman elected to the Officership position in 1976 at EECMY was Mrs Elizabeth Karorissa<sup>54</sup>; the second, elected in January 1991 as one of the EECMY Church officers is Mrs Tsehay Kenaa.<sup>55</sup> In 1986 two women were elected from two different synods; Mrs Yenenesh Gelata from the central synod of the EECMY and Mrs Felekech Nigussie from the Kaffa-Illubabor Bethel synod. She is a women's work secretary of the synod and still serves as one of the synod officers. But Mrs Gelata served for five years as a synod treasurer and currently she is a student at the University of Reading. In the same year from the same synod Mrs Hirut Megersa who holds a diploma in theology was appointed as a parish co-ordinator. Mrs Megersa is the only woman in the EECMY to be appointed to such a position and the central synod is also the only synod to have a woman in such a place.

The EECMY and this synod should be commended for encouraging the women in such positions which were reserved for men only for centuries. But the question which remains is why have more women not emerged until now? Was there any weakness with these former elected women and their leadership? The answer is definitely not. Women are intelligent, gifted and brave enough in leadership like their male counterparts, but the hidden agenda is that the decision to appoint the women to any executive post is controlled by brothers. Therefore, the appointment of women was delayed for sometime. Did the women who were elected to such positions bring any change for the rest of the women of the Church? This is the area where difficulties are found. It can be seen from their experiences that they have not brought about much change for the status of women, because they are too small in number. Each of the elected women goes to different meetings where there are more than seven men. So how can one person convince the seven people? It is

problematic. The Church seems to be satisfied by women's limited participation but women themselves are not satisfied with their place and status in the Church.

Sometimes the Church treats the women almost like a secular society. This should not be. As quoted in Monica Furlong's book *Dangerous Delight; Women and Power in the Church*, Sara Maitland says: "on the question of sexism in employment, the Churches have allowed themselves to mirror almost exactly the patterns of the outside world".<sup>56</sup> Some years back one of the pastors was transferred from a district to the head office with his job. His wife was the districts women's work secretary who had a lot of experience. But being a woman she left her job and followed him. The Church did not have a vacancy for her, nevertheless, her husband is a pastor and a man, so there must be a place for a man.

At present, she has to stay at home to put a man and children's needs before her needs. She is unemployed and unpaid and her poverty definitely affects the whole family. It can be suggested that such experience is copied directly from secular practice. This is just one example and a dozen of such experiences can be mentioned.

Although there are such experiences, the EECMY former president, Mr Francis Stephanos mentioned a deep concern about the women's issue in his final report of 1993. He forcefully suggested that women should be appointed or elected to any leadership and executive positions in the Church. Most importantly he goes on to say: "all decision making bodies of the Church ought to have at least 50% of women as full members in order to allow women to speak for themselves and make appropriate decisions".<sup>57</sup>

As other EECMY former presidents did, Stephan has been giving sufficient support to develop women in education and training etc. In addition the Western synod of the EECMY became the first in deciding to have 40% women delegates on the synod assembly. Though such

decisions were made by the Church some years ago, this synod implemented it indeed by including in its constitution women's full participation in all activities of the synod. Appreciation should go to this synod and there will be an appeal to the other synods in order to review their constitutions to include women in every ministry.

One argument remains with women's services, because this synod excluded all lay people by its by-laws and terms of references from leading parishes, districts, and synod. It is well noted that in the EECMY women have not yet been ordained, and if the above positions are specifically reserved for ordained ministers who are men, the logic is that women are unqualified to participate in all Church activities. If this is the case is there not a contradiction with the women's service recent decision? If this synod really wants to change the situation of women, it may need some adjustment to its by-laws, which excludes lay people in order to encompass women (who are the lay people) in all its activities, otherwise the decision will be a day dream.

To sum up, as many of the Church leaders suggest, women's issues must be considered by local congregations as well as by parishes, districts and synod leaders in order to develop women in family, society and in the Church. At home a woman is working for her own small family, in the congregation she works together with other women for the big all-enveloping family - the Church. One of the Caribbean ladies says

The Church would not survive without the women....the women contributed in all different ways, financially, spiritually....women are always praying and travelling more so than the men.<sup>58</sup>

The conclusion here is that women are important for the growth of the Church in every sphere. Women are gifted and called by God to minister like their male counterparts. Christian authority to serve is derived from Christ and does not belong to anyone else.

As has been seen so far, in theory, women are allowed to participate in many of the Church ministries, but the question which remains is, why not all?

In the following chapter we shall consider the restricted area of ministry for women namely the ordination of women in the EECMY.

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## *CHAPTER 3*

# *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*

It has been suggested that there are many varieties of ministry. When we consider the ministry of women in the Church we see they should be eligible to perform every variety of ministry but, because of the matter of gender, women cannot be involved in all ministry of the Church including leadership.

Although ministry depends on calling, the calling of women as ordained ministers creates questions and debate in most Churches.

Similarly the EECMY has faced difficulties in accepting the ordination of women to the priesthood. However, the EECMY does not reject it totally, though it is not ready to accept it right now.

The term priesthood may have different meanings, but the most common biblical term for the word priest is the Hebrew word 'Kohen'.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the Old Testament, in the priestly tradition particularly, priests are the tribe of Levi. They are one of the twelve tribes of Israel descended from and named after Jacob's twelve sons.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective these priests represent both God and the people of Israel in a special way and have to bring sacrifices to God because he had chosen them to do so.

When the New Testament is considered, the term 'Priest' (hiereus)<sup>3</sup> is never used to designate the ordained minister in any respect. Rather the concept of the term in the New Testament shows the Priesthood of Christ which is very different from the concept in the Old Testament, because Christ's priesthood is unique. Christ is the only high priest who reconciled mankind with the Father by his death and resurrection. As can be seen in the further discussion in the New Testament, there is a sense of universal priesthood rather than one which is limited within one family.

The gospels make it clear that Jesus did give his followers a share in his mission of proclaiming God's kingdom (cf. Mk, 3:13-15; 6:7-13). It is true that these followers who shared the ministry were both men and women who would represent him in the Church ministry after Easter.

As stated by Christian Howard, in the book *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood- Further Report*:

In the New Testament the term [priesthood is] received on the one hand, for the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ and, on the other hand, for the royal and prophetic priesthood of all baptised. The priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the baptised have in their respective ways the function of sacrifice and intercession.<sup>4</sup>

Here the above two points make it more clear what priesthood means in the Church today. It emphasises the priesthood of Christ which is shared equally by all believers. It is also important to note that all other concepts of priesthood after the resurrection are derived from and are wholly dependent upon it.<sup>5</sup> As stated in 1 Peter 2.5, the priesthood of the whole people of God is the consequence of one being united into Christ by baptism. In view of this all those who are baptised in him are the wholly royal priest of God in Church today.

This does not mean that the Church may not need special ministers such as priests or ordained minister. It certainly does. Hanson says "The Church developed the official ministry because it needed official ministry".<sup>6</sup> Nowadays the Church needs to have various ministers in its daily activities, because God ordered that teachers, prophets and evangelists are needed to perform the evangelistic work. Priests have been replaced by ministers of the word.

Considering the ministries of women in general and their ordination to priesthood, many Churches faced a problem about

accepting it, though women are among the baptised and the followers of Christ.

### 3.1 The Ordination of Women in General

The above issue became the crucial matter in Britain in the 1970's when the Methodist Church in England opened the discussion about the ordination of women. The situation has undergone some change, for example in her book *The Case for Women's Ministry*<sup>7</sup>, Edward comments that, though many doubts remain over whether women should be allowed pastoral charge, the Old Catholic Church of Europe accepted the ordination of women to diaconate. Edward goes on to say that in the USA and some parts of Africa, Hong Kong and Europe itself, some development had taken place regarding the ordination of women. But during these periods, the Church of England took more time to come to the final decision to ordain women as pastors rather than deaconess. The Church of England had many discussions before it came to a final decision and ordained women in March 1994.

It can be suggested that the Church of England may be a good example to the other Churches to accept the ordination of women smoothly, because although the discussion on the matter has taken ages in this Church, finally it has not found any biblical evidence which accept the ordination of men and ignore the ordination of women to the priesthood. But if the priesthood is considered in terms of power, no one can relinquish power without struggling. Neither can it be gained suddenly. Therefore, the feminist theologians understand that women's development in Church and society is a process which goes forward with deep maturity. It is an open ended journey until it reaches its final goal. However, the first ordination of women took place in the USA by 1853<sup>8</sup> and still it seems most likely to be a new phenomenon to many Churches in the world, because the male Church

leaders have not wanted to consider women's ordination to the priesthood.

The Roman Catholic Church is very conservative and rejects the ordination of women, believing that Jesus did not ordain any women.<sup>9</sup> But Sister Joan Chittister<sup>10</sup> insists that Jesus did not ordain anybody. Whatever the opponents of the ordination of women say, the major issue, which should not be forgotten by any Church, is that women were followers of Jesus and they are commissioned by Jesus himself to be part of the great revelation of the gospel, the same as men. But as has been discussed so far most of the Churches do not want to include women in this ministry. For this reason feminist theologians have begun to reflect on such prejudices. For example Catherine Booth<sup>11</sup>, the mother of the Salvation Army told her husband that she too had something to say to the Church. She believed she shared this revelation with God which should be shared with the Church. Today in the Church women should be allowed to speak the message that they get directly or indirectly. Perhaps one day the Holy Spirit may show all the biases that are exercised against the women's ministry, especially when the male priests want to make the priesthood ministry the monopoly of males. Every woman who engages in supporting the ordination of women is not concerned only about herself though some people see it only in personal terms. Sara Maitland, in her book *A Map of the New Country* tells of one woman who insists

We are not talking about the ordination of nuns to the priesthood. We are not talking about the ordination of me, or you, or any other group. We are talking about the ordination of women: nun women, single women, married women, divorced women. Black women, white women, Chicano women, women with children, women without children. We are only talking about the ordination of women. Otherwise there is simply no point at all.<sup>12</sup>

In the view of the above explanation the struggling of women seems to be for the acceptance of their ministry in all Churches. The ordination of women has great implications for the life of the Church and its future ministry, for there is no Church history without women and men. At every Church in the world women are too eager to serve fully with their talents and gifts according to their call. But is there any room for them? As Rosemary Ruther says, "Religious feminists experience a starvation of sacramental nourishment".<sup>13</sup> Nowadays all over the world there are such situations in the Church because women are not allowed to serve the Holy Sacraments, though Paul declares the equality of men and women in Christ (Gal, 3:28).

### **3.2 The Ordination of Women in the EECMY**

In Chapter Two I have attempted to indicate the different ministries that women are engaged in. Nevertheless in this chapter the discussion will be focused on the specific issue of ordained ministry which is exclusively allowed to men only.

According to Lutheran understanding<sup>14</sup> the term 'ordained ministry' denotes that the ministry within the Church which Lutherans have called the ministry of Word and Sacrament, the pastoral office of preaching. This is one of the institutional ministries, but because it is essential for the Churches life, it is unique among them. Persons ordained to this ministry are called in Lutheran Churches 'pastor', 'priest', 'bishop', 'president', 'superintendent' and 'dean'.<sup>15</sup>

The definition of the term indicates that ordained ministry is one of the Church ministries and its most important element is the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is also the pastoral office of preaching. In the view of Lutheran Churches the above titles can be given only to those who are ordained. The ordained ministry is also based on calling, the same as any other ministries in the Church, though it requires some elements such as theological education, personal feeling and good character. As it is cited by Chipu Mtombeni,



in the *Book of Concord* Martin Luther says "Administering the Sacraments depends on 'one's calling'"<sup>16</sup>

It has already been mentioned that the ministry depends on a call directly or indirectly from God. This ministry is made up of men and women who respond in faith to the invitation of God through the Word. Beginning from the time of the Old Testament and throughout the New Testament, including these days, God is the one who takes the initiative to invite the people to his purpose. This purpose is clearly stated by the author of 1 Peter

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of God who called out of darkness into his marvellous light.

1 Peter, 2:9<sup>17</sup>

Some years back I was asked by the EECMY information office to comment on the ordination of women in the EECMY. I remember at the time I used the above reference to indicate the ministry of women in the Church to include the ordained ministry.

God summoned his people, male or female, from the community according to his will. Those who are called by God are considered to be a holy nation and God's own chosen ones. They are also commissioned to serve him. In this divine call there is no difference between male and female. All human kind is called, but only those who respond to this call can declare this wonderful love of God who called them from darkness to the excellent light.

If this is the case is there any reason that prevents women from attaining the full ministry of the Church, especially from the ministry of Word and Sacrament in which the love of God is highly declared?

On the one hand, women are among the chosen ones and can claim to serve the holy God who embodied them by his Power. On the other hand there are some Bible passages which seem not to agree with the priesthood of women, namely some of the Pauline letters

such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-36; 1 Timothy 2:8-15.<sup>18</sup> They are very difficult to deal with.<sup>19</sup> Moreover these parts of the scriptures hardly allow women to preach and teach at all which are the primary work of the ordained pastors. Not only that, they emphasise the subordination of women to men.

After all how could it be possible to reconcile these opposite thoughts about the ordination of women? For this reason nowadays there are two parties in the Church. One of the most fascinating issues is how both parties use the scriptures to justify their different positions.

Considering this issue, one can question whether there is a convincing reason not to ordain women. Is it really the scriptural problem? As the Reverend Debela Birri puts it "the real problem is an hermeneutic problem as there is no universal standard of interpretation which is accepted to all parties".<sup>20</sup> Like other Churches all over the world the EECMY faces difficulty because both thoughts come from the scripture and it seems problematic to accept one and reject the other. In this case any of the scriptures need not to be rejected, rather interpretation of the passages may give the necessary solution.

When we consider the ordination of women in the EECMY particularly, there would be some arguments for and against, to indicate the problems at the moment which hinders women from being ordained. As has been noted the evidence from scriptures is one of the arguments. This should be considered carefully, rather than just copying the experience of the early Church as it was.

The ordination of women is not an easy discussion, because it is the most controversial issue in the Church today. I speak from the Lutheran Church's viewpoint - it is very diverse. For example the Malagasy Lutheran Church had discussed it for about forty years without reaching a resolution.<sup>21</sup>

The discussion of the ordination of women in the EECMY had started almost more than a decade ago, but it was conceived before the decade. Because of certain reasons, discussion on this subject has been delayed for sometime. Nevertheless, the first consultation on this issue was held in July 1989 and the second was just after it had elapsed. The most surprising element is that though the consultation was a discussion on women's issues, in the first consultation there were only four women participants, whereas there were thirty men.<sup>22</sup> Similarly the second consultation consisted of three women and thirty eight men.<sup>23</sup>

There is an Oromo proverb (Oromo is the largest tribe in Ethiopia):

Akkaa inchubifineef chubani  
Akkaa it inkabaneefmo iraa archasu

*(sink in it not to be sin and rub it off do not stay in it.) that is, you do something because you have to but you do it reluctantly.*

Similarly, the small number of women participating gave less force to the issue and it seems unimaginable to think that three women could convince the thirty men. Whether there were negative or positive recommendations the fact is that virtually all the discussions were dominated by men. Nevertheless both consultations opened many ways to discuss the place of women in the Church, family and society as well.

The male participants themselves believed that unless the balanced number of women and men participated and discussed together, the men only could not come to the final solution. Furthermore, the participants recommend that more women should attend whenever such meetings occurred. This idea seems to be good and accepted, but the problem behind it is that there is a quota for every synod. For example, every evangelism department heads of the

synods, Bible school directors, presidents of the synods etc., must attend and all of these are male leaders. If this is the case, how could more women get priorities to attend any meeting to talk about themselves? Therefore, unless a special quota is given to women it would be difficult to have more women in any meeting of the Church. If the large number or average number of women cannot be present in this consultation, the Church may face difficulties in reaching a final decision.

### **3.3 The Arguments Concerning the Ordination of Women**

Since there is not a large amount of material on the ordination of women in the EECMY attempts will be made, by using the references and experiences from other Churches, to indicate some reasons why this Church should come to the decisive point to ordain women to the office of the pastorate.

It seems very clear that the question of women's ordination has been and is a very controversial matter. In the New Testament itself we cannot find any clear statement concerning the role of women which relates to this issue. Generally the concept of the women's role in the New Testament as a whole does not indicate clearly what ordination is and nowhere does it say that the men or the women should be set aside to administer the sacraments as we know them today.<sup>23</sup> The only thing that has been reported by the early Church is that the Christians came there together for prayer and breaking of the bread. The liturgy and who presided over it is not mentioned. What we consider in 1 Cor, 10:1ff, and 11:33 is the general idea, for these passages never indicate who presided over the liturgy. Therefore, sometimes it seems difficult to suggest or give concrete judgement on the matter and particularly difficult to say a man could be ordained and a woman could not.

### 3.4 Order of Creation

The first objection that people raise against the ordination of women is totally based on the order of creation. Though the first creation account in Genesis 1 assures the equality of men and women, although traditional, it was accepted that the man is presented as the head and the woman as subordinate to the man. This thought was taken from the Genesis 2 creation story and Genesis 3 speaks about the story of the Fall which was caused by the woman. Paul himself based his argument on the creation story where Adam was formed first and Eve second (1 Tim, 2:13). For this reason many people believe that the incongruity of women's ordination was a command from the time of the creation by God himself. On this ground Paul confirms that woman is subordinate to man for she was formed after him.

Phyllis Tribble<sup>24</sup> recognises both creation stories but she argues that the formation of Eve after Adam does not mean her to be inferior to him, rather she is a helper and is equal to man. According to Tribble the formation of Eve after Adam does not mean last should be least, but rather the last may be first as both the biblical theologians and the literary critics show. In the same way the account moves to its climax, not to its decline in the creation of woman. In this view Eve is not an afterthought, rather she is the culmination. If this is the case Eve might be superior. Patricia Gundry<sup>25</sup> claims that according to the climax of creation Eve was superior, but she does emphasise Eve's superiority and accepts that Eve was not under Adam but equal to him. This argument then cannot legitimately be used to deny ordination to women.

Mr Wadajo W. Senbet<sup>26</sup> commented on the creation order especially on the naming of woman by the man. It is really surprising because he categorises women under animals indicating that the man

gave a name to the woman as he did to animals over which the creator gave him power to rule and subdue.

According to W. Senbet a woman was originally an unthinking person like animals who needs guidelines from a man as did the animals. Thus a woman at any time could not be considered for pastoral work. But if the naming is the issue, Phyllis Tribble<sup>27</sup> understands it in a different way. In fact the man gave names to every animal (Gen, 2:19-20) but with the women he does not do so in the same manner.

In calling the animals by name, Adham establishes supremacy over them and fails to find a fit helper.

In calling woman Adham does not name her and does find in her a counterpart. Female and Male are equal sexes. Neither has authority over the other.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, 'woman' by itself is not a name, it is a common noun and it is not a proper noun at all, unless it designates gender. To be a helper (ezer)<sup>29</sup> does not imply inferiority at all. The term 'ezer' even indicates one of the characteristics of God.

In general, man and woman were created in the image of God (Gen, 1:27). In both creation accounts there is no indication of hierarchy which would lead us to assume that woman has the image of God in different or less ways than man. Mary Evans puts it thus:

The helper fit for man is counterpart, his complement, his partner, his companion and his associate, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.<sup>30</sup>

Here Adam called a woman bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh and never says she is inferior to him. If this is the case the creation order never opposed women's equality to serve as ordained ministers. For this reason this argument against the ordination of women is not convincing.

### 3.5 The Fall

Almost all the Church fathers blame the woman for bringing sin to this world through her own fault and the man seems to be described as completely free of the guilt. Tertullian said "God's sentence hangs still over all you sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devils gateway"<sup>31</sup>, and Von Rad calls the woman a temptress.<sup>32</sup> Paul Ricoever says "woman represents the points of weakness".<sup>33</sup> The above three scholars' statements are directed to the same point which is to the fall. It is assumed Adam was tempted by Eve into eating the fruit which was forbidden by God. Likewise, as a result of Eve's weakness the serpent dared to come to her. So that it was Eve's fault that the devil could enter into the world. Therefore, it seems to be true that a woman who is a gateway of the devil could not be appointed as an ordained minister, but man may be free to join this because he was free of guilt in bringing evil into the world.

One can argue that the woman was not the only one to cause the fall. What does the scripture say? Was man really innocent of the matter? As Genesis 3:7 shows, it was only when both had taken the fruit and eaten it the eyes of both opened and they understood that they were naked. Here both are involved in the cause of the fall. Mary Evans says "they sinned and fell as individuals but also as pairs".<sup>34</sup> According to Evans' explanation, both are involved in disobedience, neither is better than the other. Here the sin which led to the fall is disobedience. This fallen man was renewed by Christ and could serve as an ordained minister, women too are also saved by Christ. If this is the case, can we find any reason that could hinder the woman from being ordained?

Ricoeur regards woman as weak referring to the conversation that she had with the serpent. But Phyllis Tribble argues that the woman (Eve) was clever and that was why the serpent went to her.

Eve did theology by making conversation with the serpent and she had great confidence in what she did as an intelligent person rather than being weak.

Peter Brunner<sup>35</sup> argues against the ordination of women by referring to a dogmatic principle and spiritual authority to exercise the pastoral ministry. As quoted in Debela, Brunner says:

Can this spiritual authority be exercised by a woman in the assembled ecclesia without repudiating the Kephale-structure of the order in which woman stands, eo ipso, that is, by the very act of exercising such authority, and thereby also damaging a concrete ethical consummation of the subordination implied in this order and its corresponding command.<sup>36</sup>

Brunner wants to make clear the importance of the Kephale-structure, especially when his emphasis is on the woman as a subordinate to a man. Thus by any means she could not exercise such a ministry. Further this order was commanded by God at creation. Brunner goes on to assert that the ordination of women to the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments attacks the fundamental laws and commands of God.

Though Brunner holds such a strong argument against the ordination of women, on the other hand he admits that God can perform beyond the basic principles to allow women to go beyond what is usual. As quoted in Birri, Brunner puts

The Church must exercise extreme caution in maintaining that in a particular concrete situation such an extraordinary intervention of God has taken place. In Churches that at this time are not suffering under persecution or are not blessed with awakening of prophets in their midst, such an intervention is highly unlikely. In such Churches women should not be ordained to the pastoral office.<sup>37</sup>

R.T. Beck and G.E. Duffield argue that "God can send women prophets if he wishes, but we cannot send women pastors".<sup>38</sup> Although the



Church leaders like R.T. Beck and G.E. Duffield refused to accept the possibility of women pastors it remains that at any time God can intervene when it is necessary to call women or men as pastors. In the Church we can observe that often the Church refuses to affirm the woman's call for pastoral ministry. In this manner the call of women has suffered because of the Church structure, it is not because women are not called. Though ordination is a human prerogative women are blocked by the structure.

If we look at the structure of the Church we see how it developed as a pyramid of power where women were only to be found in the powerless bottom layer and cannot participate in decision making about themselves especially in relation to the ordination of women. This affects their talents, calling and their right to be equal in Christ. So why does the Church continue to refuse to send women as pastors? The Church is not using structures to serve people, but is using people to serve structures<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, it seems to be even more appropriate to send women as pastors to celebrate sacraments when God calls them for such service, rather than to become obstacles in honouring the man-made structures.

### 3.6 The Fatherhood of God

Another current debate on the ordination of women is the fatherhood of God. As many people suggest, God is often identified by the male character. According to Roger Hamerton Kelly's research<sup>40</sup>, God is described by Jesus as 'Father' over 170 times in the New Testament and only eleven times in the Old Testament.

Mary Daly also argues that "If God is male then male is God, if God is seen as male then woman is not fully in the image of God".<sup>41</sup> According to Daly's argument a woman does not have any image of God, because God is identified only by the male. Whether one agrees or not it is true that most languages which talk about God are in the masculine. There are languages that write about God in the female

character too. For example, God is considered as a giver of food and water<sup>42</sup> and clothing for people who are in need.<sup>43</sup> Having seen the above passages these works of God are acknowledged as female work. In Numbers 11:12 God is called Mother. Nowadays some of the feminist theologians have questions in their mind regarding the naming of God as male only. But as Brian Wren suggests, "every naming of God has been borrowed from human experience, because God is not masculine or feminine at all. Instead he is the source of both masculine and feminine".<sup>44</sup> It is then understandable that all men and women are credited in the image of God and baptised in the name of God in order to become one body of Christ. If this is the case man and woman can represent God equally. The theological understanding of God's name is metaphorical and it is not literal. This being so it is clear that this is not a good enough reason to object against the ordination of women.

For this reason Debela Birri cites to W. Vogel saying that:

The fatherhood of God should be presented in support of the ordination of women rather than against it, because of the all-encompassing nature of God as Father (not in the sense that God is male).<sup>45</sup>

In the same way the teaching of Paul in Galatians 3:28 is a supportive element for the fullness of the human community in the service of the Church today. Whatever it is, men and women cannot be a representation of God but both have freedom to be his representative.

As quoted in the report "The ordination of women to the priesthood" Professor Geoffrey Lamp says that:

The ambassador represents the Queen. He acts in her name; he speaks for her....but he is not a representation of her.<sup>46</sup>

In view of this Chrysostom<sup>47</sup> is right to explain that it is not the man who is responsible for the offerings becoming Christ's body and blood,

but rather it is Christ himself. If this is the case why do we put our mind in question saying that only man can represent God because he is male but woman cannot because of the fact she is female. Therefore, it can be concluded as follows:

The ordination of women to the priesthood would bring the complementary and wholeness to the ministry and thus reflect a wholeness that belongs to the nature of God as God has been revealed to us.<sup>48</sup>

The other argument against the ordination of women referred to the belief that Jesus chose only men to be his apostles. Because of this women are assumed not to be able to preside over sacraments and to administer the host. But one can dispute the belief that this is sufficient reason to exclude the women from being ordained these days. At the time Jesus might have had sufficient reasons to do so, but he did not command us to keep on doing the same thing forever. As quoted in Birri, Fuller argues:

that Jesus appointed only males among the twelve says nothing about the ministry of the Church in the period immediately after Easter.<sup>49</sup>

Here, Fuller clearly justifies that, after Easter the new vision began. The reason why Jesus did appoint only the twelve Jewish men was just to symbolise the twelve tribes of Israel. In this sense he excluded all gentiles both men and women and not only women. Most interestingly he accepted women, even those who were not Jewish and they became important in the movement.<sup>50</sup>

If the basic argument against the ordination of women is to depend on their absence from the twelve disciples, we will face another problem, because few of or ordained men today are Jewish. Gentile men can be priests, there is no reason to deny women from being ordained. This is clearly supported in Galatians 3:27.

### 3.7 Incarnation and Priesthood

If the incarnation defined the concept is as follows:

The concept of incarnation (Lat. *incarnatio* being in flesh) has been applied in the Christian community to the mystery of union between divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup>

Some people argue that the process of incarnation in which the male person is magnified is wholly consistent with the nature of God as a male. The implication of that is only the male person can represent Christ. So that if a woman becomes a priest there is inconsistency because it seems historically wrong since Christ was not incarnate in female form, but in the form of a man. But as the definition of the term makes it clear incarnation applied to the divinity and humanity of Christ who is fully God and human. Although God is creator and almighty in the case of incarnation, he became flesh and voluntarily shared the pain, suffering and emptied himself. He even took our flesh. But although he became a human male, he is not a divine male. One must also acknowledge the role of a woman in the process. Christ's being born of woman can assure us that God can use both female and male equally to fulfil his purpose. As it is voiced in *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*

It was male human nature that Son of God united to His divine nature but it was female human nature that was chosen to be the bearer of divine Son of God.<sup>52</sup>

This view of this incarnation suggests that both sexes, each individual has its advantage, because both are so involved in the Christ-event, so one can say the economy of salvation is equal for both sexes.

Having seen the attitude of Jesus towards women and the choosing of woman by God to fulfil his plan of salvation to the whole humankind, it seems more reasonable to include women into the

priesthood ministry rather than ignoring them. Women fully participated in the plan of God and in the work of God in incarnation. Therefore, there is no reason to assume ordination as a monopoly of male believers. Women can be suggested as the gateway to the promise of God which is fulfilled in the case of incarnation. Although, the opponents of the ordination of women use exclusive language to challenge the ordination of women, the Bible does not show this to be so important.

The Bible does not support a concept of a human being - male or female. The biblical view of humanity is theocentric. One concept includes male and female alike; both are created in the image of God, both have fallen into sin, both are reconciled by Christ and are called into a new community in Him.<sup>53</sup>

According to the above description man and woman are created equally in the image of God and they are saved by Christ and guaranteed reconciliation and the sense of humanity. It is true that the participation of women in incarnation refers back to the account of the creation in which God viewed significantly both man and woman equally. If it is biblically true, why do we hear that women and incarnation are incongruent? To assume incarnation as the point to be used as against the ordination of women is a radical contradiction of biblical anthropology.

### **3.8 Ecumenism, Tradition, Culture and Physical Weakness**

The preceding understanding of the relationship between the wider ecumenical fellowship which means the various denominations in the country may make it problematic to accept the ordination of women within the EECMY communion. As has been stated earlier, there are a number of denominations in Ethiopia. Of these, many of them never accept women's ministry at all especially as preachers.

Therefore, some of the EECMY leaders comment that to ordain women to the pastoral ministry within the EECMY at this time would have a negative effect on the moves toward an ecumenical understanding.

Dr James B. Keefer<sup>54</sup>, an American lecturer at the MYS comments on the danger that EECMY may face if it ordains women, especially with the two big neighbours, the EOC and the Muslim Community. Here Keefer's argument seems to be important, because these organisations are well known in Ethiopia and most of the EECMY members came from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church background. Of course, some members also converted from the Muslim religion. According to the above statement in order to continue its witnessing among Muslims the EECMY seems likely to stop the encouragement of the ordination of women.

In Muslim's background, women are not assumed to be pastors at all. In addition, up to this time the EOC is not very positive with regards to the ministry of women as pastors or preachers. If this is the case two comments can be raised. Is the EECMY bound by the reasons of the different denominations or by the Word of Christ? It also seems too late for the EECMY to follow all the EOC experience, because in the EOC women are not allowed to preach, whereas in the EECMY they have been preaching for many years, as this Church believes in the ministry of all people of God.

Secondly, since the Islamic religion never allows women to perform any teaching or preaching, it seems unrealistic to demand of the EECMY not to ordain women in order to keep the relationship with the Muslims.

Although women are commissioned to participate in the Church ministry, traditionally women's participation in the ordained ministry is rejected. Here if the Lutheran tradition is considered, however, the issue of the ordination of women is the heated one at the moment, the founder of the Lutheran Church ignored it. Luther wrote in the Book

of Concord, Article XXIII "Priests, preachers and religious instructors should be men".<sup>55</sup> He goes on in Article VIII<sup>56</sup> to say that the Church is the assembly of saints and true believers. Luther did admit that women are among the true believers, but his hesitation was on their position as priests and religious instructors. This idea is deep rooted in the Lutheran Churches and is used as a norm to deny the ordination of women any time. For Luther women are too foolish, have lots of filth and little wisdom.<sup>57</sup>

If scripture is considered there is not any place where God called people because of their qualification, wisdom and purity of their own. Rather God calls people to be empowered and purity to be used for his purpose in serving the Church. "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean (Acts 10:15)".<sup>58</sup>

The other argument that is suggested by the EECMY against the ordination of women is that of a cultural problem. According to Dr James B. Keefer, culture, by definition, "is all around behaviour which is socially acquired, that is, the material and non-material traits which are passed on from one generation to another".<sup>59</sup> Since it seems impossible to practice religion outside one's culture the EECMY does not ignore the Ethiopian culture when it comes to a religious practice including women's ministry. The gospel is preached according to the context of the society, otherwise it would be meaningless. But the question that remains is, whether it would be appropriate to ordain women referring to the Ethiopian culture? Within Ethiopian society some people may suggest that it would be very strange to call women 'priests' At the moment the EECMY does have a very small number of women theologians. Even though they have not yet been ordained many people call these women theologians 'Kess' [Priest] and women preachers are popular. In African traditional beliefs women participate in the cultic leadership. If this is the case culturally there would not be any norm which denies the ordination of women.

As far as the ordination of women in the EECMY is concerned the foreign missionaries are bigger opponents than the indigenous people and these missionaries feed new negative information about the subject from their own experience back at home. For example Dr James B. Keefer reports that "when a woman stands up to serve them Holy Communion they will walk out".<sup>60</sup> It may seem to be a good idea to point to such experiences, but does it help the Church to develop the ministry of women? The experience itself seems to be foreign to the Ethiopian culture because the celebration of any religious rite is very much respected. For this fact such behaviour would not be expected in the Church even if the women served the Holy Communion.

As reported by E. Margaret Howe, in the book *Women and The Church Leadership* (1982) one lady says:

I went to celebrate communion once in a congregation....where I regularly preach. They had taken the communion vessels from the building. I returned the next Sunday....they had everything prepared....but one received the Communion.<sup>61</sup>

As it had been indicated, Dr Keefer reflects on his own culture for the above painful story is the experience in one of the American Churches.

One German missionary fellow says "I hope to show that I am against the ordination of women for the ministry because I am for their ministry in the EECMY".<sup>62</sup>

The reason is not clear why most of the missionaries are against the ordination of women in the EECMY. Both the above countries have ordained women and appointed their own women bishops.<sup>63</sup> It is questionable why they did not consult the EECMY when they made a great decision to ordain women and then appointed their women as bishops. The EECMY would like to work with missionaries as co-workers and partners in respecting every Christian service, including the ministry of women, and it seems to be the responsibility of the



EECMY to evaluate and balance all the negative points against the ministry of women.

In addition, the EECMY needs to challenge within its own culture and context rather than try to adopt specially the negative comments from abroad in ordaining women as pastors.

Theological education is one of the current arguments against the ordination of women in the EECMY. Mr Wadajo W. Senbet argues that the pastor should be well versed. He means that those who are called to be pastors should have enough theological education in order to avoid false teaching and to keep the doctrine of the Church. This may be true but in the EECMY there are women theologians who have trained with men but do not go on to the final ordination as the men do . If this is the case, where is the value of theological education when it comes to the women?

As far as it has been discovered most of the arguments lie in tradition and culture which human beings create and wish to keep as norms. However, there is no concrete theological argument against the ordination of women. If this is the case the following statement would be an appropriate conclusion as to the reason for not opposing the ordination of women,

As the basic mission of the Church is to proclaim the gospel, the Church should not exclude any members from discharging this ministry only on the basis of sex. Therefore, the question should no longer be asked whether women should be ordained? but the question should rather be whether there is any reason why women may not be ordained?<sup>64</sup>

The above quotation makes it clear that any member of the Church including women, should participate in the Church ministry according to his/her call. Therefore it seems to be the comprehensive work of the EECMY to make people aware that men and women are created in the image of God, both sinned and saved equally. Likewise

in allowing both to serve as ordained ministers for service the EECMY would be acting with justice.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### ***Where Do We Go From Here?***

Before we identify how to go forward with the issues of women it would be helpful to sum up what has been discussed so far. Without considering the details of the subject I shall measure up the experience of women in both church and society regarding the attitudes towards their silencing. The other point which should be addressed is the fact that women's activity and involvement in both church and society is hardly valued.

#### **4.1 Experience of Women's Silence in Society**

Regarding the status of women in society, in many areas they are deprived of their humanity and limited only to doing housework and bringing up the children and also caring for elders. Even those who are educated are limited to work in some low paid jobs. For example:

Women are nurses, men are doctors; women are teachers, men are headmasters; women are social workers, men are social directors; women are librarians, men are chief librarians; women are in the humanities, men are scientists and technologists; women are civil servants, men are a permanent under secretaries; women are deaconess's, men are bishops.<sup>1</sup>

Women are the victimised ones in the areas of education, employment, decision-making and health. They do the backbreaking work, eat the smallest amount of food and do not have sufficient resistance to disease. As a result their health condition is very poor. It is true that educated women can excel in any position in society but the society does not believe that they can. Their ability is limited by their gender. In Ethiopian society women are rarely allowed to lead institutions, because of the custom, not because of the written law. There is a kind of belief that if a woman even leads the family it

brings degradation to the quality of the society. In addition there is a fear that women's leadership is very hard. There is an Oromo proverb:

Mootummaan dubbartü karra cufati olcha

(Women's administration will keep the barn closed the whole day)<sup>2</sup>

Such exaggeration creates a climate which does not respect the ability of women. Both educated and uneducated women have difficulties though it is not to the same degree. The illiterate ones live a life of darkness because they cannot read and write. Therefore, they are alienated from the news around the world.

These days there are some women who are in leading positions. For example, the present health minister of Ethiopia is a woman, but this is just a drop of water which dropped into the sea. In general women are powerless in the equal distribution of any opportunity. In women's jobs, injustice is still structured. Women find it difficult to be educated and at the same time there are very few avenues to get good jobs. They do the same work and get paid less. Is it just? It is really unjust that women with equal training and skill should stay at the bottom of the professional ladder when men jump to the top. (See chapter 1)

Nowadays people are very eager to get jobs and to be at work. This is human desire. Work is important to women and they need to be treated as humans in society. As has been mentioned in the account of creation it is part of the responsibilities for which both men and women were created. Here one can ask does all work have equal value? What is the value of women's work (housework)? All work should have value. For instance office and any clerical work as well as housework should be valued. Yet still housework is unpaid. Storkey says that:



Housework and child care are just as much work as mining or engineering. Care of an elderly partner or relative is just as much work as retailing or professional sport.<sup>3</sup>

Storkey's suggestion seems to be right, everybody's work should have value, otherwise discrimination and dehumanisation may follow. Particularly in Africa, to balance the reality of the value of women's work with other jobs is not easy, especially in the rural areas. Women do much of the agricultural work beside caring for the family (See chapter 1) Often one hears people saying that women (girls) should be busy with housework and in the field while men relax. The reason is not so much to give them value, as to suggest that they are to honour the men by working hard. There is one common proverb "Women and donkeys do not feel tired". It is certain that in most families and societies women are not respected as men's equals and that their activities are valueless. These reasons are not convincing, women are human, so they can feel tired too. Their activities and creativity need to have value.

Nowadays the feminist theologian's concern is to find ways to make sure that women's work whether in the home or office is really work. It needs to be honoured and respected. The time which they spend should matter as much as the men's. Similarly women need reasonable payment and good jobs as well. The idea that holds that job satisfaction should be the male's prerogative, needs to be rejected completely.

## **4.2 Experience of Women's Silence in Church**

When one looks at the situation of women in the Church there is great variety because some Churches accept women to do preaching and teaching and some do not. In EECMY women's work in hand crafts is highly accepted, though the value is beneficial for the male leaders. In the EECMY women's ministry is very much appreciated. They do valuable ministry for the Church.

As has been discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the leaders of the EECMY value very much the ministry of women, particularly in fund raising. When the hand crafts are sold the Church can obtain necessary money for its work. This financial success is the labour of women, but at every annual report of the Church the value is recorded to the parish and district leaders. There is no record at all for women. Many of the real decisions take place at this level. Therefore, it seems that the silencing of women in decision making seems to be unrealistic. It may be contrary to God's intentions for humanity. No one is better than the other. They are both stewards of the creation. If this is the case it seems reasonable that women get valued in their ministry equally as men.

We know that there are some Bible passages which urge women to be silent but this is understandable in the context of the Graeco-Roman world. Thus they should not be used for the discrimination of women in Church of today, because the contemporary Church needs to interpret the Bible within its own context without forgetting that the Bible is an authoritative Word of God. It communicates to people in any situation as the Word of Love. God does not favour discrimination of women, that was why Jesus shared with the women during his earthly ministry. Women are not only passive members of the Church and obliged to be silent. They are valued by Christ and taught and commissioned to witness the good news of resurrection even to the disciples.

The Church of Christ then needs to value the involvement of women in every activity without any restriction. But the question remains, does the Church really treat women as Jesus used to treat them? If not, is it not ignoring the role model of Jesus' leadership? Is everybody's ministry equally accepted in the Church? For instance the example of women's ministry in priesthood is debated in many

Churches. Some Churches accept it and some do not. The EECMY is one of the Churches which has not yet accepted the ordination of women.

It can be assumed that the reason for this is that being women they cannot represent Christ. As has been noted in chapter 3, both opponents and supporters of the ordination of women use the scriptures. Here, to consider the above and to argue against traditional assumption it seems helpful to underline the following points.

First, the Bible affirms that both sexes are equal - looking at Genesis 1:26ff it assures that male and female are made in the image of God. In this case the theology of women's ministry seems to be right because it emphasises the equality of men and women before God. The incarnation of Jesus is further evidence. He came and shared with pain, death and finally was resurrected on behalf of all humanity for both men and women. He made free all the world in his name. For this reason Paul boldly affirms that all are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Secondly the complementarity of the sexes is clearly identified as they are equal before God. Though the opponents of women's ordination assume that man on his own is central to all ministry, the Bible bluntly teaches the mutual dependence of both sexes. Ministry is not concerned with the value of the sexes. However, some people believe that priests must be male, as representing God's active role and women must remain passive. The Bible teaches that both can represent God. The qualities needed for Christian ministry are not the physical strength of men or high academic qualifications. The most important qualities seem to be spiritual and personal gifts which can be evident equally in both women and men. Therefore, both need each other to complete and build the Church, both can exercise the ministry of priesthood.

Thirdly, the interesting point is that priesthood and ministry belong to the whole people of God. Considering this area there are two kinds of approaches in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old

Testament (Hebrew Bible) priesthood was allowed only to male descendants of Levi tribes. These males had to fulfil some physical qualification.

In the New Testament this Levitical or tribal priesthood was replaced by Jesus Christ who was not of this tribe (Heb. 3:1). He is the high priest of all. Jesus Christ shared this priesthood with his followers without any partiality. (See Chapter 3) Although Jesus chose the twelve males He did not ordain any of them. Therefore, the Church needs to consider the ordination of women to complete the messages of the Gospel as it assures that priesthood belongs to all people of God through baptism.

Fourthly, there is a belief, which is true that men and women equally represent humanity. But in the Jewish tradition often the humanity of women was hardly recognised and women were represented by their husbands. (See chapter 3) On the contrary in the New Testament, both men and women are baptised as full members of God's family in the name of Christ. Women are fully human. Therefore, the Church should respect this humanity equally and should open the way to the ordination of women.

Finally the Church may accept that women and men can represent God equally. But for some Churches it still seems a very strange thought. Those who do not accept this can argue that only men can represent Christ or God in ordained ministry because Christ was incarnate as male so a woman could not symbolise God. To understand ministry in such a way seems to be dangerous, because God created both sexes for his own purpose and commissioned them for the Church ministry. Christ in his redemptive work represents and encompasses all humanity not just its male part. Moreover, all language which talks about God as Father or Christ as male, is metaphorical, for God is beyond gender, is spirit and not a man at all (cf. John 4:24; Hos. 11:9). Therefore, no one is unique and perfect

except Christ. All Christians can represent him. Both women's and men's ministry should be valued by the Church as it is valued before God.

Thus, we have considered the problem of women's ministry. As has been discussed so far in most cases there is injustice. Therefore, some changes are needed. We must ask, therefore, what steps can we take to change the situation of women in the Church and in society as a whole?

### **4.3 Future Strategies**

Nowadays women became aware that they can identify the injustice which affects them. They have experience of discrimination and oppression even within the family and in society as a whole. Patriarchal structural systems keep women as second class citizens.

Considering the situation of women the LWF/WICAS<sup>4</sup> has been making great effort to conscientise women and concentrates on some points. These points are suggested as universal strategies to empower women.

#### **(1) Promote leadership development**

Women need to be equipped and trained in order to gain leadership skills, because they are the most active members in the family, society and Church. The just society considers women and men as equals in sharing tasks in home and receiving equal access to work. In Church, as women are the majority of active members, they should occupy more than half of the positions. But it is sad that gender bias is evident everywhere. Thus women are always absent from equal sharing. Law and decision making is performed at their absence. Still women remain active members in the Church. Why is it that such injustice continues? Changes do need to come. The conclusion of the issue seems to be as follows:

With the realisation that men and women are equal before God, all Church members - both

men and women - must be trained to share responsibilities fairly. Justice for all God's creatures should be one of the first lessons of leadership development for all people in Church. Justice is an issue of faith.<sup>5</sup>

If the Church encourages such equality the process leads easily to transformation and to a new community where equality exists. In so doing illiteracy and lack of skills will be eliminated. When women get chances of training they can dare to speak in public. Participating in different workshops and seminars is also an excellent way to equip women.

## **(2) Emphasis of justice**

In most societies women are victims of poverty, racism, violence, unemployment, homelessness and illiteracy etc. In general women do not get an equal share in most distributions. That means women's situation is problematic. The Church exists within society. But the question is, as followers of Christ, how are the Churches to look at the issues of such injustice? When Christ was on this earth He did not ignore the situation of the victimised ones. As a God of love He interfered in it and shared with the people who were oppressed.

Similarly the Church can interfere in the situation of the victimised not only by praying and counselling but also by participating and sharing the situation equally with the people. The Church can talk and find the root of the violence together with them. Sharing with the victimised ones is the very crucial way of creating justice within the community.

## **(3) Involve women in theological studies**

This is another important subject that feminist theologians focus on because for many years, studying theology has been understood mainly as male's work. But as time changes, theology becomes a subject which all people of God need to study, because it is learning

and talking about God. As it indicated in the book "Lutheran World Federation Women in Church and Society"

Theology has as its task today the mission of liberating everyone for participation in God's Good News. People need to be liberated from cultural traditions that have perpetuated division and inequality.<sup>6</sup>

Here the main emphasis of the above statement is that theology belongs to everyone and teaches human liberation and not violence or victimization. Therefore, it is an important subject to be studied especially by the people who are powerless and lack the possibility of equal participation. Women find themselves among the powerless groups. Thus it seems really necessary for women to do theology, because doing theology itself is doing justice and bringing God's gospel to the victimised of the world.

In doing theology, reaching the grass roots with theological education seems to be the essential strategy. At the grass roots women may have their own experience of doing theology according to their gifts and abilities. Conscientising Church members to become aware of the essence of women's theological education needs to be introduced at this level.

#### (4) Retrieval of History

As has been stated so far, women have been engaged in ministry during every age of the Church, but their record has not been fairly described. Much of what was recorded were the negative aspects. Women were obliged to be silent because of custom, though they could legally talk in public. They were pupils at the feet of Christ and they were the people who conveyed the message of the new community, which is the resurrection of Christ. Women were sent to witness to the disciples (Lk. 24:1-11). Where are the stories of such wonderful contributions in the Church history?

For many years from the Old Testament up to these days power in Church and society has been in the hands of the men who have been holding the official records of history. In the past men deliberately arranged systematic ways of discriminating against women. Since then the women themselves have accepted the system without any question because at the time they did not recognise this as discrimination at all.<sup>7</sup>

As time has gone on, an awareness has grown. Feminist theologians need to underline and call attention to past histories. Women had memorable histories though there is little record of them. Ivone Gebara and others say that "the fact that something is not written does not mean that it did not happen".<sup>8</sup> Here the same is true with women's history in Church and society. Many examples can be taken in the Bible itself. For instance people recognise Martha as only a cook, but she did more than that. Martha proclaimed the Word of confession of faith like Peter did, but was it recognised by the Church fathers in such a way? Bührig mentions her concern of how the story of man and woman was recorded in different ways.

Martha says:

Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. That sounds almost exactly like the famous confession of Peter in Matthew 16... in which the Church is founded. The confession of a man and the confession of a woman...the one founded a Church, the other is overlooked.<sup>9</sup>

But in Church history no one considers that the Church has been founded on both men's and women's confession of faith. God called both men and women to minister according to their gifts. It has its basis in the Bible but in this case women's ministry was overlooked, instead another pattern was created by the dominant patriarchal system.



Beginning from the early ages of Christianity women's history has been neglected. It is an afterthought. Such experience has been deep rooted throughout patriarchal history. It spread all over the world. Therefore, it is no wonder that we find a dozen of similar experiences in today's Church. For example in the EECMY men and women together have made many efforts in developing the Church and expanding the gospel to every corner.

Onesimos Nesib and Aster Ganno were the first indigenous people to translate the "Oromo" Bible into their native Oromo language. "Oromo" language is the language which is spoken by the largest tribes in the country.

During the time of slavery Onesimos had been kidnapped. When slavery was ended he came back to the country and joined the missionary school. He was a man of faith and his intention was to be a full-time missionary to the Oromo land. After the completion of his school in Asmera the missionaries sent him to Sweden in order to train in theological education. He came back from Sweden and planned to start off the translation of the Oromo Bible. Unfortunately he faced difficulties in not having a good vocabulary or appropriate Oromo idioms, because during his time of being away he had forgotten most of the Oromo words. At the time unless he had help he could not have achieved his goal at all.

As Gustav Aren cites others in his book "Evangelical pioneers in Ethiopia"

Help eventually came through Aster Ganno, one of the girls who had been entrusted to the mission at Imukllu in 1886....It rightfully bore the name of Onesimos Nesib, but it is evident that much credit to the final structure of the language ought to go to his young female assistant.<sup>10</sup>

Aster was such an outstanding, considerably gifted woman who made an immeasurable contribution in doing the project of translating

the Oromo Bible. On the other hand Aren goes on to say "the Oromo version of Holy Scripture is a remarkable achievement; it was to all intents the fruit of the dedicated labour of one man, Onesimos Nesib".<sup>11</sup> Looking at the whole history of the Oromo Bible version Onesimos was the primary person to take initiative, but he was not at all able to complete the project without the help which had come from a woman. Since this was the case, how could it be suggested that "it was....the fruit of the dedicated labour to one man"? Why was Aster's history overlooked?

Onesimos had two major problems in trying to complete his work of translation, but wonderful help and encouragement came from the women at the time. That is "help" came from Aster who did all the structuring of the work and put the appropriate words in the text. The other one was from his own wife Lidia Dimbo. While Onesimos was busy with the printing of the Book at St Chrischone, he heard of the death of his baby girl and the illness of his children at home. As a result he wished to stop the work and turn back to home in order to comfort his wife. As quoted in Aren:

On learning about her husband's reaction, she wrote back to him that he must in no circumstances shirk his duty but stay at St Chrischone till the entire Bible went through the press. She warned: "when I heard that you thought of running away from your work, I was greatly worried. I was afraid that your ship might be caught by a hurricane like that which struck the ship by which Jonah travelled".<sup>12</sup>

There is significant evidence, therefore, that the translation of the Oromo Bible was not the work of a man only. Rather women's contribution was significant. It is certain that at least half of the work was done by the successful contributions of women. Onesimos was a good servant of God. He died in 1931 and was buried at Nekemt where he was serving for a long time. His headstone was renewed

once more by the Church. But the sad story is that nobody knows what happened to Aster. Actually there are few records about her and she was one of the forgotten ones.

Nasise Liban was also a great woman of faith although very little about her is recorded. As quoted in Aren "a request urging....to ordain Daffa came from one of the outstanding ladies among the evangelical leaders in Ethiopia, Nasise Liban".<sup>13</sup> Daffa Jammo was the first ordained minister in the history of the western synod of the EECMY in 1947. He was also the first president of the WS. Theologically speaking his indirect call came through this woman. She represented the Church which called him to be a Church leader as an ordained minister.

Nasise urged Daffa to be the leader of the Church because the time was during the second world war and the missionaries had to leave the country. This intelligent woman thought of the future of the Church. The war happened, the missionaries left for their countries. Daffa became the good servant of God and he led the Church as well as a missionary pastor.

The question remains, who was Nasise? What was her status in the Church? Everybody in the EECMY knows that the Reverend Daffa is the first "Keiss" (Priest) in the western synod, but does anyone know the detailed history of Nasise? Whether it is in Church or in society, women's history is fragmented. Everywhere, it needs to be revitalised. It may be the primary task of the feminist theologians to bring these stories together and shape a new history. Although women lack the place to write their own history, they have to be aware that they have their own history too. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that "women are neglected in the writing of history, although the effects of their lives and actions are a reality in history".<sup>14</sup>

Feminist theologians, therefore, identify some of the ways of reading history, especially the Bible, to restore to women their history.

#### (5) New Reading of the Bible

It is interesting that the Bible is always the main source of divine authority, and there is no theology which ignores this authority. On the other hand there are many interpretations which are possible. One method emphasises the ways in which the liberating word of God makes free those who are in captivity and are oppressed.

When the position of women is considered, they are among the groups that try to identify themselves as the freed people of God to whom the gospel is directly delivered. Women have their own experience. From their experience of re-reading the Bible women (feminist theologians) can raise some questions' for example questions of biblical hermeneutics and new ways of using the Bible.

Feminist theologians identify the patriarchal context itself which is the source for both Bible and the emerging Christianity. But the patriarchal system does not fully show the historical revelation of God in Christ, because this system more or less denies the full personhood of women. It does undermine the humanity and freedom of women which has been found by Christ himself. For this reason the feminist theologians search for ways to find a new paradigm for biblical hermeneutics and theology in order to go forward with a new biblical reading. But can one question whether it is possible to reject the sacred symbols of traditional patriarchal ways of reading the Bible. As quoted in Katherine Zappone, Carol Christ says "symbols systems cannot simply be rejected, they must be replaced".<sup>15</sup> It is these symbols that the feminist theologians claim needs to be replaced by inclusive ones which include women too. Sacred symbols in the Bible represent humanity and are not dependent on sexuality. This happens when we read the Bible from a feminist perspective.

On the other hand looking at the Bible we see that it reflects both divine and patriarchal experience. Elisabeth Schussler. Fiorenza insists that "the New Testament is not only a source of revelatory truth but also a source for patriarchal subordination and domination".<sup>16</sup> Because of this the task of feminist theology should focus on the critical analysis of the two above mentioned sources. It means that one must recognise both the revelation of God throughout history and also the androcentrism of texts and traditions. This recognises, as a methodological principle, that being human and being Christian is also a social, cultural and historical process.

What can be identified in the source of patriarchal traditions is discrimination against women. In the revelatory source we find love, freedom and equality, because God is a God of love. He includes women in his work of revelation and redemption. God cannot favour discrimination against women. If this was the case there would not be any reason not to re-read the Bible from a feminist perspective.

Elsa Tamez<sup>17</sup> voices that to read the Bible from a woman's perspective gives real meaning to women and to men who believe in this reality. She goes on to say:

To read the Bible from a woman's perspective, we must read it with women's eyes, that is to say, conscious of the existence of individuals who are cast aside because of their sex.<sup>18</sup>

In view of this, to read the Bible from a woman's perspective leads us to discover the new method and additionally discovering the hidden real history of women. This method helps practically to understand the intention of God for both sexes.

The Bible has always been a base and foundation for Church ministry and has been used to identify injustice in both Church and society. With the new reading of the Bible by women the Church ministry can receive a new and prophetic vision which will help us to discover both God and God's image in all human beings. This image

has often been claimed only for men in the documents of the Church fathers and traditions. Reading the Bible from the perspective of women also leads to an understanding that women are fully human and are to be valued as such. To ignore this reality leads to a major offence against the Creator. Feminist theologians proclaim such new messages. They can be described as contemporary prophets.

Katherine Doob Sakenfeld suggests:

Feminism may be viewed as a contemporary prophetic movement that announces judgement on the patriarchy of contemporary culture and calls for repentance and change.<sup>19</sup>

A new way of reading the Bible facilitates and encourages awareness, respect, and becomes a good base for a new humanity in Christ. When we read the Bible from women's perspectives we are sure that God is present with women too. In so doing the new community of brotherhood and sisterhood will be formed. In addition the Church and society would use inclusive language. This is what I hope will be practised in the EECMY and in Ethiopian society soon.

Here a number of strategies have been identified. It seems important to implement into action these steps which I have mentioned. In addition it seems essential to consider how such strategies would fit in with the experience of the EECMY.

#### **4.4 How do these Strategies Fit in with Experience of the EECMY?**

As I have said earlier there is not enough material on the ministry of women of the EECMY. Most of the materials I have used are from the western Churches experience. Therefore, there may be a question of how these fit in with experiences of the EECMY. Most are taken from the scriptures. Similarly many of the feminist theologians all over the world begin their arguments about women with the Bible. The other point which should be considered is that most of Women's

problems are universal - for example women's oppression in Church and society in relation to work is similar world-wide. In this case it is clear that it does fit in with the EECMY experience. But there is also a great distance between the different experiences.

For example the question of the ordination of women in the western Churches began a century ago whereas in the EECMY only a decade has elapsed. The EECMY has not yet produced its own theology. In addition to that, the present interpretation of the scripture itself is from the western perspective. However, although there are difficulties with making a carbon copy of the West, most of the arguments can easily fit in with the EECMY. Particularly in relation to their position in home and society, it seems difficult to compare the lives of Ethiopian women with those of women in Europe or the USA. Primarily there is a major shortage of education and development. The priority of women in the country at the present time seems to be for survival. For example if we consider the problem of women with the housework it seems too early to demand that the man does the housework and to demand from the government payment for this work. At this stage it is in relation to the appreciation and valuing of work that we should be working for. The government should also use every opportunity to develop women's literacy, education, health and employment.

In the case of the EECMY since the liturgies and worship patterns more or less reflect the experience of the Lutheran Church of the West, the logic of fitting in with the EECMY experience seems to be appropriate. Again the question remains - is it helpful for the experience of the EECMY?

#### **4.5 Are these Experiences Helpful for the EECMY?**

Although some people argue against importing any experience of women's ministry from abroad, in many ways most of the experiences from abroad seem to be helpful for the development of women in the

EECMY. For example, most of the time the Ethiopian women are more happy listening rather than talking and being in the home busy with the housework. But after some years they have come to realise that they could actually do other public jobs and could speak rather than be passive at all times.

In relation to women's ministry in the Church we also recognised that women are not only gifted at preparing food, but they are also gifted to do the purpose of God equally with men. It is a fact that these ideas came from abroad. In particular the question of the ordination of women is definitely an idea which came from abroad, although it is also biblical.

Looking at this experience Wadajo W. Senbet<sup>20</sup> argues that the EECMY should have its own understanding on any decision on the ordination of women. This idea seems to be acceptable because it needs to be attentive to contextual and cultural situation. W. Senbet goes on to say the EECMY "should not try to practice just because it is so in other Church abroad".<sup>21</sup>

According to W. Senbet, it seems hopeless to take into account any of the experiences from abroad related to the ordination of women or even the ministry of women as a whole.

The issue which remains is, however, that the EECMY has adopted most of its worship patterns from abroad. If this is the case why is the Church advised not to use any experience from abroad regarding the ministry of women? It seems unrealistic, the EECMY is not an island. Thus this argument has a weak point, so that its weakness is to make women's ministry different from other experiences of the Church's ministry.

To justify the truth the EECMY may find it is very helpful to adopt some experience from sister churches and other churches in the world. Regarding the ordination of women the experience of the Church of England can even be a helpful example to the EECMY in



deciding the question of the ordination of women. I have used materials from feminist theologians which is of relevance to the EECMY, but there are some ideas which are not helpful, particularly to the EECMY.

#### 4.6 Difficulties with Feminist Theologians?

There are a number of different kinds of feminism which I have not discussed. I have made very few comments on Marxist feminism from the experience of the Marxist government in Ethiopia. I have found that it was too radical and too far from the context of the country so that it was not helpful.

I have not discussed about the radical feminism because this theory holds a woman-centred idea and eliminate men from its centre. This though is most likely to encourage selfishness. I support women's friendship, but to ignore any male friendship does not recognise the reality. Of course for certain reasons many feminist theologians may embrace a woman-centred lifestyle just to ignore the dominant patriarchal system which oppresses women.

In my opinion radical feminists do not have any vision of how to live with men. Elaine Storkey<sup>22</sup> says that many radical feminists choose simply to write men off. Such feminists cannot see any future in having relationships with men. But as Christian feminists we have to think beyond this. Storkey goes on to say that the patriarchal system was not the root to oppress women, but

for the root issue is not patriarchy or even patriarchy....plus capitalists....exploitation. These themselves are only symptoms of a deeper problem still. The sin that takes root in the human heart feeds not human and social structures and prevents and distorts relationships.<sup>23</sup>

Here Storkey makes it clear that the patriarchal system is not a real problem on its own, but sin is the big issue which created corruption in human life and damages relationships between men and women.

Therefore, to ignore men totally is not a convincing point, rather it seems more valuable to find another means to restore the distorted relationship. As Christians we should recognise that there would be the possibility of change and reconciliation. For this change, repentance is crucial.<sup>24</sup>

These are the reasons why I favour not to accept the idea of radical feminist thought. In the first place men and women were created to rule over the universe, to serve God in having mutual love and care for one another. Opposing this mutual service is contrary to the command of God. This is what the EECMY believes and I do too.

Above all, the experience of women's silence in church and society seems to be the area which should be considered by the contemporary feminist theologians. Women are often absent on decision-making and in gaining higher positions in both church and society. Although it seems difficult to reject what has existed in the past, as human beings, women need changed structures in both places. They need new strategies for their development because most of the structures do not fit in with the women of today and they are exclusive systems of oppression.

We have said that women's problems are universal. It could be argued that women in the Ethiopia may have even more difficulties than the other women in the world. Therefore, many of the arguments which have been discussed can be related to the situation of women in Ethiopia. In the view of this the EECMY may benefit from the experience of feminist theologians which have been mentioned, although it seems impossible to accept the ideas of all feminists.

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5. *ibid.* p.9.
6. *ibid.* p.23
7. Marga Bührig, Woman Invisible. A Personal Odyssey in Christian Feminism, op. cit, p.25.
8. Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, Mary Mother of God. Mother of the Poor, Burns and Oates, 1987, p.29.
9. Marga Bührig, Woman Invisible, op. cit. p.24.
10. Gustav Area, Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia, op. cit. p.385
11. *ibid.*, p.385
12. *ibid.* p.385
13. *ibid.* p.138
14. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza op. cit. In Memory of Her, op. cit. p.85
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17. Sallie McFague. Metaphorical Theology. Models of God in Religious Language, SCM, 1992, p.22.
18. *ibid.* p.10
19. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials", Letty M. Russell (ed) Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985, p.55.

20. Wadajo W. Senbet. EECMY Theological Consultation 1989, op. cit. p.1.
21. *ibid.* p.1.
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24. *ibid.* p.163

## *CONCLUSION*

Although there are many areas to be discussed on the issues of women in church and society, because of the limited pages it is impossible to include everything in this dissertation.

In the first chapter the situation of women in Ethiopia has been considered thoroughly. The focus has been on the areas of responsibility for the whole family and the constant work in the home and in the fields which does not have much value. Other issues such as literacy, education, employment and health were discussed.

The second chapter concentrated on the ministry of women in the EECMY.. The EECMY's primary aim is to proclaim the Gospel and to aid both the spiritual and material well-being of the community. In this church women are also involved in ministry in various ways, such as evangelism and social work. They preach the Word and implement it indeed by sharing spiritual and material help with society. But though they are such active members in both spiritual and social work, they cannot conduct every kind of ministry everywhere because some congregations do not allow the women to preach from the pulpit.

Women are the best friends of religion and are the majority who attend the church. Women are the most active in fund raising. But because they are women they cannot have any responsibility in managing the finance and administration. They are also absent from decision-making and holding high positions though they have sufficient qualifications for the job.

The issue of ordination has been discussed thoroughly in chapter three. However, some people consider the question of the ordination of women as a new phenomenon. As it is one of the ministries, it can be suggested that the conception of women's ordination was started when Christ commissioned the women to proclaim the good news to

the disciples. Therefore, to refuse ordination to women seems to be unrealistic and unbiblical. The church should consider the word of God at the creation and how Christ approached men and women. Many churches believe that God is masculine and thus women cannot represent Him. Some churches may need to respect cultures and customs not to ordain women, but it seems the duty of the church to re-evaluate its structures and compare them with the scriptures.

In the previous analysis I have tried to show the place of women in church and society, including their daily activities and involvement's. In the last chapter the future strategies have been considered. For any difficulties there should be some solutions if the two parties sit together and discuss the matter. Similarly men and women should come together and try to solve the problem of inequality in both church and society. In doing so they themselves can bring about the best solution. This would emerge when there is an equal share of position, power and everything in church and society.

Although there are various kinds of feminism the Christian feminism seems to be relevant to the EECMY for it encourages the community of men and women which is the real purpose of God for both sexes. Such a future is really needed in the life of the church. As quoted in Marga Bührig, a young Swiss woman says that:

I dream of a church in which the voice of its members will be heard, in which we are aware that we, with our many problems, are understood. I dream of a church in which we women share in shaping the structures, and the decision-making, in which we do not simply conform to the existing situation....In this church others no longer take action and make decisions for women. We can discuss what concerns us. In my dream this church is a true preacher of Good News, a herald of liberation from discrimination and oppression.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation seems to make a reasonable claim that any church should be able to share. It shows entirely the equality of women and men which Christ himself highlighted.

### **Recommendations**

1. Women's ministry in society should have value at all spheres.
2. Women are the most active. On the other hand they are the victimised ones in respect of equal distribution, especially their health is at risk. The state should, therefore, offer them free treatment, especially for maternity cases.
3. Priority should be given to educate women, because it is one of the best ways of improving the life of the nation.
4. Women need to have prominent positions in church and society, e.g. head teachers, hospital directors and heads of regional administrations. In the church women should be appointed as executive secretaries and church leaders. To be educated in theology is not enough, but they should be seminary professors and department heads.
5. Scholarship should be made available for women both for academic training and for other forms of theological education, such as seminars, workshops, short-term courses etc.
6. Both women's and men's ministry should be respected equally in order that they use their gifts and talents according to their call. Ordination of women should be allowed to those who have such a calling.

## *Reference: Conclusion*

1. Marga Bührig, Woman Invisible, op. cit., p.111.



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